CARSON OF RED RIVER

HAROLD BINDLOSS

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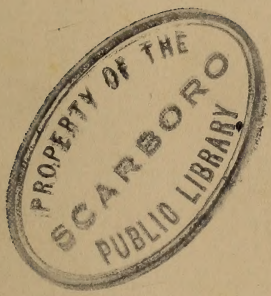

CARSON OF RED RIVER

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BY

HAROLD BINDLOSS

AUTHOR OF

THE WILDERNESS PATROL,
NORTHWEST!, ETC.

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY

PUBLISHED IN ENGLAND UNDER THE
TITLE, "THE LUTE PLAYER"

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Printed in the United States of America

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CHAPTER I

BLAKE'S PIANO

THE evening was calm, and the window at Blake's flat by the river mouth was open. Kit Carson, standing with his back against the curtains, felt the rather shabby room was homelike, and for long he had not known a home. When he got a holiday he went to Netherhall, and after the drawing office, he liked to carry a gun across the moors; but the big house at the dale head had not the charm that marked Blake's cheap flat.

Kit, however, thought the room less shabby than usual. For one thing, Mrs. Blake had got a new rug and the soft green harmonized with the brown stained boards. Then a new cottage piano occupied a corner and a water-color drawing, Kit's present to Mabel Blake, was on the wall. Kit had an eye for line and he thought the drawing was not bad. Perhaps its purchase was something of an extravagance, but Kit was extravagant and Mabel was his pal's wife.

Kit felt the charm that marked the flat was really Mabel's. She was plucky and cheerful, although her

fight was hard. Blake was a sober fellow, but when he married her had debts, and his pay, like Kit's, was small. Kit was his groom, and at the wedding had rather thought to lose his friend. Instead, he had got another.

Mrs. Blake, carrying a tray, came in, and when Blake took her load, gave Kit a happy smile.

"The pennies for the meter did not run out, and my birthday feast is served," she said, and balancing on an arched foot, as if she meant to dance, indicated her dress. "But how do you like my new clothes?"

Kit studied her. Mabel Blake was short and light; her figure was boyish and Kit knew her boyishly alert and happy.

"I can't judge the material, but the lines are good. One gets a sense of balance and poise, which, I think, is not altogether the dressmaker's art. Anyhow, you can dance, and if the shipyard company goes broke we'll try our luck on the road. You will dance for crowded houses and I will play the lute. Tom, perhaps, might be business manager."

Mabel laughed and Blake grinned, for he knew the others knew his money went.

"Isn't the lute rather out-of-date?" he inquired.

"Ah," said Kit, "there's its attraction! The troubadours used the lute and your wife has got the joy and confidence people knew in the old spacious days."

"I wonder whether those days were joyous," said Blake. "All the same, Mabel's pluck is good. When we married she undertook an awkward job, but she never grumbles. Anyhow, you're not a trouba-

dour. Your job's to make drawings for modern machines."

"There's sober Tom!" Mabel remarked. "But supper will soon get cold."

They sat down at the little round table, and Mabel, glancing at Kit, rather thought he ascribed to her qualities that were properly his. Kit, like her husband, had a post in the drawing office at the shipbuilding yard. He was thin but athletic, and as a rule his eyes twinkled. Kit indulged his whimsical imagination and sometimes one did not know if he joked. Mrs. Blake knew him generous and romantic, but he was a first-class draftsman and made progress at the office. In the meantime, Kit, with frank satisfaction, used his knife and fork. At Netherhall one dined ceremoniously and wore evening clothes, but one did not get food like the suppers Mabel cooked on the gas stove. By and by she indicated the piano.

"Sometimes you're not very keen, Kit. For example, I was forced to point out I'd got new clothes and ask for a compliment; and now it looks as if you had not noticed all Tom's extravagance. But perhaps you want to be polite?"

"I saw the piano, and after supper I'll try it. Just now I'm very happily occupied. All the same, I'm glad to see Tom's luck has turned."

"The piano's not yet ours and we'll talk about it again," said Blake. "Until Kit has satisfied his appetite you must leave him alone, Mabel. Although he's sometimes romantic, he's frankly flesh and blood."

"The flesh is not very conspicuous," Kit rejoined,

and gave Mrs. Blake his plate. "One sees why Tom gets fat. If you'd like a sincere compliment may I have some more?"

By and by Blake and Kit carried off the plates, and when they came back Kit turned down the light and signing the others to the window, pulled the curtain along the rod. The flat was at the top of a tall building, the night was fine, and one looked down on rows of houses and the dark river. On the other bank blast-lamps' flames tossed, and the trembling illumination touched skeleton ships. Hammers rang with a rhythmic beat; and at the top of the steep slope steelworks engines throbbed. In the background a pillar of fire, intense and white, was reflected by a cloud. The pillar sank and vanished, and by contrast all was dark.

"Janions' converter," said Kit. "If they roll us the plates as they agreed, you ought soon to run the *Mariposa* down the launching ways. I don't know if her boiler will be ready."

"Then you're not satisfied about the circulation?" Blake inquired, and Kit thought his interest rather keen.

"We are nearly satisfied. Colvin's hurrying me, and when Mabel has had enough I must go back to the office: the tube-shop foreman wants some particulars. Anyhow, we mustn't bore Mabel. I like your window, madam. It commands a moving view."

"The fires and grime of industry?" said Mabel and laughed. "I begin to doubt if I know you, Mr. Carson. Sometimes you're the minstrel you talk

about, and sometimes a shipbuilder. Which would you really like to be?"

"I don't know. There's the trouble. Anyhow, I do like your window. It commands the road to countries not yet modernized—where men beat the monkey-skin drums and play the pipes, make love by primitive rules and kill their rivals. For example——"

A whistle shrieked on a high note and dropped to a harmonious chord; a ruby beam moved across the trembling reflections. Then a funnel and a vague, long hull stole through the shipyard smoke. The beam faded, the hull was foreshortened and the ship went round a bend. The wave she threw off beat the bank and melted in the dark.

"The *Negapatam,* bound for Singapore and the Malay seas," said Kit. "But I expect you get cold."

Blake shut the window and pulled chairs to the small gas fire; and Kit thought his doing so characteristic. Tom was a very good sort, but he was sober and, so to speak, rather soft.

"Why must you go back to the office on my birthday?" Mrs. Blake inquired.

"Well, you see, I get my pay for building ships, and the *Mariposa* will soon be waiting for her fast-steaming, anti-incrustation boiler. Our boiler; the very latest thing of the water-tube type!"

"What is a water-tube boiler? And why are you so keen about the *Mariposa's?*"

"In an ordinary marine boiler the flame goes through the flues; in the water-tube pattern the water circulates in tubes and the flame is outside.

The type has some drawbacks I mustn't bother you about, but it steams fast and carries a heavy pressure. Well, a foreign government requires four small, swift, shallow boats for tropical rivers and has ordered two; one from us, and one from the opposition yard."

Mrs. Blake nodded. "The *Mariposa's* yours; if she beats the other boat, you will build the lot?"

"Colvin hopes we'll do so. The rivers she'll navigate are muddy, and in a water-tube boiler mud is awkward. We have been forced to modify our standard pattern, but if we get the results we expect, we reckon on beating the other boat. The improvements cannot be patented, and in consequence we don't talk about our plans."

"But if the *Mariposa* wins, your competitors may bribe somebody to study her boiler."

"It's possible," Kit agreed. "All the same, the tubes are covered by a casing, and if the opposition did find out something useful, we'd have begun to build the fleet. Now you know all about it and we have done with shipbuilding. Let's try the new piano!"

He went to the piano and began to play. The others knew his talent, but they thought the music strange and melancholy. Yet the air was haunting.

"It is not piano music," Blake remarked.

"I expect it was first written for the guitar; Spanish music's Moorish music. Don't you hear the strings and the wind in the sand? Can't you picture the camel-dung fires in front of the black tents, and smell the curling smoke. But I'll try a song. It's about the King of Spain who lost

Gibraltar, but did not lose all the fellow lost who lost his heart. Do you hear the guitars tinkle under the lattice window?"

"I do not," said Blake, smiling. "Still, you see, I'm not a lute player."

"Oh, well, the next lot's blatantly pictorial," said Kit and pushed down the pedal. "Shipyard hammers! You can hear that! Now the *Negapatam's* whistle calls in the smoke and fog. She steals down river; her screw throbs steadily and stops. The pilot's boat vanishes and the engines beat a quicker rhythm. The dark water heaves and splashes at the bows. She steers south for sunshine and the islands of pearls and spice."

He shut the piano and swung the revolving stool. "Well, the instrument's jolly good and I hope it will soon be yours."

"The company stipulates for punctual payments," Blake remarked.

"If you can stand for my bringing my fiddle and Mabel will play, I'll meet the next installment. I've got some fresh music, but my landlady's restive and I imagine she means to be firm."

"Practise when you like," said Mabel. "You have talent, Kit, and I think you know our house is yours."

"I know you are very kind, and Tom's a first-class sort. When I joined up at the yard I was raw and trustful, but he saw me through the boiler shop and steered me past some awkward pitfalls. At the yard, he's old Tom and famous for his stanchness and soberness. Then when he married I got another friend and now your house is home.

Well, I hope your birthdays will be happy and numerous. Your faithful servant, ma'am!"

Blake's look was rather embarrassed, but Mabel's smile was frank and kind. She trusted her husband and Tom was altogether her lover. Kit admitted he had not used much reserve, but Mabel knew his sincerity, and when he declared he was her servant he did not boast. He owed his friends much and his habit was to pay his debts. Then Mabel turned her head, as if she listened, and got up.

"I haven't yet given you coffee, and I believe the stove is out. Have you a penny, Tom?"

"Perhaps it's strange, but I have two shillings, and I don't know a stove that cooks like yours," said Kit. "To-night's a festival. Let's be generous!"

"You don't keep house," Mabel rejoined. "So long as the stove is just, I'm content, but sometimes I doubt."

She took the penny, and when she went off Blake pulled out his wallet.

"My debt has bothered me, Kit, and to pay is some relief. I'm afraid I forced you to be frugal."

Kit left the notes alone. When Blake married he was embarrassed for money and Kit urged him to use his.

"You must think for Mabel. I don't want the sum."

"Take the notes," said Blake, and indicated the piano. "My luck has rather obviously begun to turn."

"I admit I wondered," Kit remarked.

Blake lighted his pipe and knitted his brows. Kit had recently imagined Tom's look was careworn.

"You are entitled to inquire. Not long since I took my model to Allinson and he was interested. In fact he was willing to help me experiment."

"Splendid!" said Kit, for Blake had long experimented on an improvement for the marine oil-engine. "Allinson's the man to make the thing go."

"If I'd seen him sooner, it would have helped," Blake remarked, rather moodily. "Anyhow, he agrees the gear will work, and since he thinks we can get a patent, he gave me a small sum for an option. It accounts for the piano, and my paying my debt. The notes are yours. Thank you, Kit!"

Kit took the notes and soon afterwards Mabel carried in the coffee. They began to talk about Blake's invention, but by and by she asked: "Are you going to Netherhall for your holidays, Kit?"

"I hope to get off after the *Mariposa's* trial run."

Mrs. Blake smiled, a sympathetic smile. "You want to feel you go in triumph? Well, since you made the boiler drawings, if the *Mariposa* steams very fast, it will be something of a triumph."

"I'd like Evelyn to know I made some progress," Kit admitted modestly.

"You promised to show me her portrait. Have you got it?"

Kit pulled out his pocket-book and Mabel studied the photograph. Evelyn was obviously young, and Mabel thought her attractive, but she was not altogether satisfied. Evelyn's mouth was ominously firm, and one got a hint of hardness. The girl was perhaps ambitious; she was not generous. . . .

"She has not yet promised to marry you?"

"Not yet. Our relations know my hopes and I

think, on the whole, approve, but Evelyn is not rich and my poverty is notorious. There's a sort of agreement that if I make good and get a proper post, we may talk about an engagement."

"But are not your relations rich?"

"My uncle, Alan Carson, was accountable for my premium at the shipyard," Kit replied in a thoughtful voice. "He's a very good sort, but he's justified to stop; then, although Netherhall's a beautiful old house, the estate is his wife's. To get me a proper job is my other uncle's part, but, so far, I haven't bothered him, and it does not look as if he were very keen. Anyhow, if he does get me a post, it will probably be abroad."

"Ah," said Blake, "the power your old, landowning families use is strange! You command our battleships, you rule the Indian Civil Service, and you marry American millionaires. But where do you expect to go?"

Kit smiled. "The Carsons are not landlords, and belong to another lot. We have nothing to do with India and battleships. Our business is to hammer iron, and for the most part our investments are in Canada . . ."

He stopped and getting up, resumed: "Mabel's tired; I expect you have had enough, and I must push off for the office."

Mabel gave him her hand, told him to come back soon, and let him go.

CHAPTER II

THE DRAWING-OFFICE

AT the top of the steps to the drawing-office Kit stopped and leaned against the rails. The building slips were occupied, and when work was pushed ahead at night he liked to look about the yard. Smoke rolled across the river; the tide ebbed and wet mudbanks reflected the steelworks fires. When the flames got dim, smaller lights trembled on the curving channel. On one side bare, skeletons of ships melted in the gloom, and behind dark walls wheels rolled. Then sparks blew from twinkling forges on a wooden stage and light hammers rattled like a rifle volley.

Kit knew the rivet gang fastened the *Mariposa's* plates, but he must get to work and he pulled out his key. The head draftsman, Blake, and the night watchman had other keys. When Kit opened the door he heard steps and somebody shouted:

"Hello, Mr. Carson!"

Kit turned and saw the boiler-shop foreman in the yard.

"When do you reckon to start us on the *Mariposa's* job?"

"You'll get the drawings in a day or two," Kit

replied. "I expect Robbins will take the plans to Colvin in the morning, and if he is satisfied, we'll make the blue prints. You have, no doubt, got your orders?"

"All's ready to shove ahead. Robbins doesn't want the tubes to stand in frame for folks to look at, and as soon as the joints are made we'll put the casing on. Well, I reckon my lot won't talk, and nobody but myself will handle the plans. The boat's a pretty model and looks as if she'd go, but our job's to drive her, and I expect the opposition would give something for your prints."

"It's possible," Kit agreed. "All the same, I understand their boat's frames are up, and they have, no doubt, begun the boiler. I must get to work at ours. Good-night, Seeley!"

He shut the door, switched on a light, and sat down. The spacious office throbbed and when the hammers crashed the windows rattled, but on the whole the noise was soothing. For the greater part of twelve hours Kit had been strenuously occupied, and now for a few minutes he could relax.

He pictured Blake and Mabel by the gas fire at the little flat, talking about Tom's good luck. Well, Tom deserved his luck; he was a first-class pal, and at the beginning had helped Kit more than he knew. Then Kit imagined for Tom to meet his household bills was hard; his clothes were not very good and he brought his lunch to the office. Tom, however, had Mabel, and Kit thought she justified all the self-denial a man, for her sake, could use.

Kit pictured her shopping where food was cheap, counting the pennies for the meter-stove, and im-

provising supper for her husband's friends. Yet she was happy. Mabel had a man's pluck, and sometimes when Kit thought about her he was moved. But he was not at all her lover. Mabel was his pal's wife and, when he was rich, he was going to marry Evelyn. To think about it would not help and he must get his drawing-board.

Unlocking a cupboard, he carried the board to a table and put out his drawing instruments. The boiler was the manager's and the head draftsman's job, but they did not draw the plans. They told Kit their notions, gave him rough sketches, and allowed him to calculate dimensions and work out details. His part was important, and he liked to know the others trusted him. In fact, if the boiler steamed as it ought to steam, he imagined they would frankly acknowledge his help, and their doing so implied his getting a better post. On the whole, he would rather stay at the yard than bother his uncle. So far, it did not look as if his progress interested Jasper Carson.

Kit measured some tubes on the drawing and began to calculate. The calculations were intricate, and by and by he pulled out his watch. His brain was getting dull, and since he did not want to stop until morning, he must brace up. He tried again and found his reckoning accurate. The trouble was, a curved tube was rather small, and the bend was sharp. It might check the water's even flow and one must allow for incrustation.

Now Kit thought about it, he had stated something like that to Colvin, and in the first plans the tube was larger. He was persuaded the first plans

would work, but Colvin did not agree. Kit went to the cupboard for the drawings he had made some time since, and stretching the paper on a board, stopped and moved the light. Where he had used the compasses another time he saw two small marks, as if somebody had used a larger radius to sweep the curve. Kit knitted his brows; he did not think he had lengthened the radius, but if he had done so, it would give an easier curve. He had argued that the curve ought to be easier.

He experimented with his compass. Unless he pressed hard, its point did not leave a mark like the other, and he was puzzled. The plans were kept in the cupboard, and he carried the key; and for some time nobody but Blake had gone to the office at night. Blake had nothing to do with the boiler, and all knew him trustworthy.

Kit admitted it was possible his compass had made the mark, and he resolved he would not bother about it. The tube must be a little larger and the curve easier. He got his scale and a book of tables and resumed his calculations. At length he was satisfied, and all was ready for Robbins to approve. Kit knew Robbins would approve. For long he had labored at the job, but the job was good. Now he was frankly tired and, stretching his arms across the table, he let himself go slack.

He was young and romantic, and the *Negapatam's* whistle had excited his imagination. Sometimes he felt the steamer's whistles called him from the drawing-office and the smoky yard. He pictured the *Mariposa* pushing up a big calm river and the muddy wave she threw off lapping the mangrove roots. He

saw dazzling sunbeams pierce the forest and touch tangled creepers and orchids on the rotting trunks. The little boat stemmed the yellow flood and her boiler steamed as the company's boiler ought to steam.

When the boat had run her trial Kit was going for a holiday, and he saw another picture. Evelyn, carrying a fishing rod, balanced on a ledge by a sparkling pool. Her clothes harmonized with the lichen on the stones, and her slender body was posed like a Greek statue. The rod bent, and Kit, in the water, held the landing-net.

The picture melted, and another got distinct. Evelyn occupied a hammock under the big oaks at Netherhall; Kit lay in the grass, and in the shade water splashed. Sometimes he joked and Evelyn smiled; sometimes he talked about the *Mariposa's* boiler. When one talked about things like that Evelyn was not bored. Kit sensed in her a practical vein, and she knew he must make his mark. Steamship whistles did not call Evelyn, but Kit smiled, a happy smile. Her part was to make home beautiful, and he was willing for her to curb his romantic extravagance.

Kit straightened his bent shoulders. Unless he got on his feet, he would soon be asleep, and he put the plans in the cupboard and locked the door. When he got his hat the watchman came in and pushed a peg into the clock.

"You're going, Mr. Carson! I s'pose nobody else was in the office since I was round?"

"I was alone. Why do you want to know?"

"Mr. Robbins's orders was, if anybody but you and Mr. Blake came back at night, I must report."

Kit smiled and went down the steps. Old Robbins used some caution, but he ought to know his men. All the same, since the boiler's advantages could not be patented, perhaps caution was justified.

In the morning Kit carried the plans to the head draftsman's table, and for a time Robbins measured and calculated. Then he said: "You have used a longer radius for the intake tube's curve. In fact, to some extent, you have gone back to our original notion."

"That is so," Kit agreed. "The water must circulate freely."

Robbins smiled. "You're an obstinate young fellow. I know you liked the first plan, but I begin to think you logical."

He used his scale, and Kit thought about the mark on the other drawing. His experiment with his compass did not banish all doubt, and he admitted he was obstinate. Obsessed by the advantage of a flowing curve, he had perhaps unconsciously tried a longer radius. Then Robbins looked up.

"Well, I believe all is right, and if Colvin agrees, we'll make the prints and templates for the shops. The job's good, and if the *Mariposa* beats the other boat, I'll see your part is known. I rather think Colvin studies you, and when a young man's wanted for a good post his word carries weight."

Kit went back to his table and took his tools from a drawer. Pulling about some at the bottom, he saw a small worn eraser he knew was not his, for

the rubber was not the stuff the company's draftsmen used. Blake, however, was fastidious and liked another sort. Kit imagined Tom had left the piece on his board, or perhaps he had carelessly carried off Tom's. He put the thing in his pocket and got to work.

The plans were sent to the shops and the boiler was built. The steamer was launched, and one morning Kit climbed to a stage by the waterside. Fifty yards off, the *Mariposa* rode at a mooring buoy and a number of important gentlemen had gone on board. The current went up river, and oily black eddies revolved along the mud-bank's edge, but the tide was not yet full and for an hour or two large steamers would not come up the channel.

By contrast with the murky water, dark sheds, smoke, and cinder heaps, the *Mariposa* was spotlessly clean. Her low hull was finely moulded, and the long shade-deck overhead followed her rail's bold curve. Tapered masts and slanted funnel harmonized with the flowing lines below. But for her brown teak deckhouse and the black clothes and green and gold uniforms of the group by a door, all on board was white; Kit thought her beautiful. Moreover, she looked speedy.

A bell rang, a little smoke curled from the funnel, and Kit pulled out his watch. The fires were lighted and since the foreign government stipulated that the boiler must steam fast, he must know when steam was up. The smoke was thin and indistinct, and he saw the combustion was good. So far, all went well, but to wait was hard and he lighted

a cigarette. A very small defect would spoil the trial, and one could not altogether guard against another's carelessness. Workmen were human.

After a time, steam blew from a pipe and stopped. The mooring chains splashed, a bell rang, and the engines began to throb. Foam tossed about the screw and the *Mariposa* leaped ahead. Her bows lifted and rode on a muddy wave. The wave sank, and re-forming at her rounded stern, broke and trailed away in a long, eddying wake. Small, angry rollers splashed against the mud and Kit's heart beat. Steam was up before the stipulated time and the boat's speed was good, but the harbor commissioners' rules were stern and the engineers dared not yet let her go. When she reached open water, all on board would acknowledge he and Robbins had made a first-class job. After a few minutes the *Mariposa* vanished round a curve and Kit returned to his drawing-table.

In the afternoon he was called to the manager's office. Two or three directors were in the room, and one said: "You are Jasper Carson's relation?"

Kit said Jasper was his uncle, and the director nodded.

"Then, it looks as if you had inherited some of his qualities. Mr. Robbins declares your help was useful, and perhaps you'll be glad to know the boiler does all we claim, and the boat is nearly a knot faster than the buyers stipulated. Stick to your job and by and by you may get a better. Our rule is to push on a keen man."

"There's another thing, Carson," said the manager.

"I have given the cashier some orders—you can take it for a mark of the company's appreciation."

Kit, with something of an effort, replied politely, and went off. His heart beat and the blood came to his skin. He was young and triumph carried a thrill.

CHAPTER III

NETHERHALL

BLEAK moors, seamed by dark gullies, enclose Netherdale, and a river, leaping from the peat, breaks on whinstone ledges and plunges into alder-shaded pools. Where the valley widens, larch woods roll up the slopes and Netherhall and its oaks occupy a flat round which the water curves. The house is old and dignified, and belonged to Mrs. Alan Carson. The Carsons were ironmasters, but when Alan married he sold his foundry. For some time the business had not prospered, and Alan was glad to let it go. He was cautious and hesitating, and when he faced obstacles he went another way. As a rule, since his marriage, the way was Mrs. Carson's way.

Four or five hours after Kit left the shipyard, he sat in the grass at Netherhall by Evelyn Haigh's basket chair. He smoked a cigarette and sometimes he talked, but for the most part he was content to look about and study Evelyn. The picture was attractive. For a background, old oaks, tufted by shaggy moss, rolled down to the stream. The leaves were touched by the coppery gleams that mark the oak when summer is young, and blue shadows lurked among the trunks.

Evelyn's clothes were white, but her shady hat and her belt were yellow. Her hair was black; her face was small, rather thin and finely molded. She was lightly built and her pose was graceful, but her mouth was firm and sometimes her look was calculating. Kit, however, did not notice things like that.

He rested his back against a tree and let himself go slack. The afternoon was hot, and but for the splash of the river, all was quiet.

"You look tired, Kit," Evelyn remarked.

"I expect I'm lazy. All the same, at the office we were pretty strenuously occupied, and I was keen about the boiler. Now the boat has run her trial, I feel I'm entitled to relax, and when one wants to loaf I don't know a better spot than Netherhall."

Evelyn agreed. Slanted sunbeams pierced the shade and touched springing fern and the velvet grass where rabbits fed. Outside the thin wood, a lily-pool in the wide lawn reflected dazzling light, and the sun was on the old house's front. The stone was stained by lichens, and yellow roses climbed the wall. One smelt flowers and heard the languid hum of bees.

"But the boat's steaming fast was your triumph," Evelyn resumed. "Then did you not get a reward?"

"I got fifty pounds a year extra pay and thought myself fortunate!"

"The company is not very generous," said Evelyn, and laughed. "Sometimes I feel your part, like mine, is rather a joke. You labor at the shipyard for ridiculous pay, but when you visit at Netherhall you fish and shoot and drive expensive cars. Your aunt

and my mother rule the dale, but when nobody is about we use stern economy. You don't, Kit——" She stopped, and touching the little yellow jewel on her neck, resumed: "In fact, I feel you're rashly extravagant."

"To buy keen satisfaction is not extravagant, and when I see you wear my present I know the investment's sound. Anyhow, Mrs. Haigh would not allow me to give you a ring."

Evelyn blushed. Kit was not her acknowledged lover, and Mrs. Haigh declared that before they talked about his marrying Evelyn he must be able to support a wife.

"Mother is very firm, but I think we'll let it go. Well, if you are not extravagant, you certainly are generous. You sister wanted a wrist-watch, and she has got the watch!"

"Oh, well. Not long since, a pal at the yard paid his debt, and since I didn't expect to be paid, I thought I was entitled to use the money."

"I don't know if you're logical, Kit. If you did not expect to be paid, why did you lend?"

"As a rule, I hate to be logical," Kit rejoined. "You see, Tom's pay is small and the girl he wanted to marry lost her post and could not get another. She had no home and her savings melted. Then relations in New Zealand sent money for her ticket and urged her to join them; but if she went it looked as if she must go for good. . . ." Kit stopped and resumed in a thoughtful voice: "Sometimes one must take a plunge, and Mabel's pluck was fine. She married Tom, and although their

fight was hard, now he's patenting a useful invention, I think their troubles are over."

"Ah," said Evelyn, "perhaps pluck is the greatest quality! So long as one is not afraid, one is not tempted to shabbiness; but after all, the risk your friends ran was daunting, and I'm not very brave."

Kit's mouth got tight. Evelyn's color came and went, and he knew she was moved. She, like him, was young, and passion and adventure called. Perhaps, if he used a strong effort he might carry her away. For all that, Kit knew he must not do so. He did not see Evelyn happy at a flat like Blake's, and to picture her saving the pennies for the stove was ridiculous. Besides, he had agreed that he must get a proper post.

"Oh, well," he said, "I expect Tom's luck was rather remarkable, and his plunge might have cost him and Mabel much. Besides, we agreed we would not be rash."

Evelyn gave him a strange look, and he doubted if she altogether approved his resignation. To know he had taken the proper line was not much comfort. Then Evelyn smiled.

"What did you buy for yourself? Since you got the money, I expect you bought something," she said in a careless voice.

Kit played up. "I bought a fiddle bow at a second-hand shop. A pretty good example of a fine old maker's workmanship. In fact, I think the dealer didn't know the treasure he had."

"Then, you did not enlighten him?" said Evelyn, and laughed. "I like to feel you can sometimes conquer your scruples. But suppose the dealer was

cleverer than you thought? Don't they fake old fiddle bows?"

"I'm a shipyard draftsman, and you don't cheat a fellow who uses scientific tools."

"It's possible," Evelyn agreed. "At all events, I imagine one does not cheat your Uncle Jasper."

Kit looked up. An old gentleman crossed the grass and stopped a few yards off. Jasper Carson was tall and thin. His hair and brows were white, and his face was lined. His dress was careless and his look, as a rule, ironically humorous, but one got a hint of force. He gave Evelyn a rather baffling smile and said to Kit:

"Loafing after your recent efforts?"

"My efforts were pretty strenuous, sir. Then, on a summer afternoon, loafing has some charm."

Jasper's glance rested on Evelyn. His look was inscrutable, but Kit thought hers got harder, as if she knew him antagonistic.

"In the circumstances, perhaps it's justifiable. You may think my statement strange, Miss Haigh, but long ago I was romantic, and when the days were golden we studied Tennyson. His verses harmonized with old English houses and ancestral trees, but the oaks at Netherhall are not the Carsons' oaks and will certainly not be Kit's. Harry's claim is first and his type's the landlord type."

Evelyn sensed a sneer. Harry Ledward was Mrs. Carson's relation.

"Tennyson is out-of-date, and we are modern," she rejoined. "Kit talked about a steamship boiler and I was not bored."

"Kit's an optimist," Jasper remarked, and turned

to his nephew. "The *Mariposa* made a first-class trial run, but perhaps you ought to wait until the other boat has steamed across the measured marks."

"I'm not anxious. The other boat's no doubt a good boat, but she has not our boiler. In the meantime, it's not important, and although you banter me about loafing, it doesn't look as if you were very much engaged."

"Netherhall is soothing," Jasper agreed. "Still I'm not altogether slack. Sometimes I ponder and sometimes I plan."

He went off, and Kit's eyes twinkled. "Jasper's plans work, and his obvious duty is to plan for me. All the same, if he wants to send me to Canada, I doubt if I'll go. He has much to do with Canadian engineering and bridge-building works, but I'm satisfied to stop in the Old Country."

"He's your friend; I doubt if he is mine," said Evelyn. "I like Alan Carson better."

"Alan is a very good sort, but when you doubt Jasper you exaggerate. All who know you are your friends."

"I wonder——" said Evelyn in a thoughtful voice. "But, if you're not too languid, let's go to the waterside and see where the big trout rise."

Kit got up and they went to the river, but he felt the tranquillity he had enjoyed was gone. Although he declared Evelyn exaggerated, Jasper had disturbed the brooding calm.

In the evening Kit leaned against the terrace wall and tuned a violin. The long drawing-room window was open, and his sister, Agatha, struck a note on the piano. The evening was hot and the light had begun

to go. One smelt wet grass and flowers touched by dew. In the gloom the river throbbed.

Evelyn, Mrs. Haigh, and Mrs. Carson occupied a bench. Mrs. Haigh was short, alert and resolute. Her lips were thin, and when she pondered her mouth got tight. Although she was rather important at Netherdale, she was not rich. Mrs. Carson was tall and dignified. She sprang from old land-owning stock; Netherhall was hers, and she ruled her husband. Alan Carson, on the terrace steps, smoked a cigar. His skin was red, he was rather fat, and dully urbane. Since his marriage he was satisfied to potter about his wife's small estate.

"The Spanish fellow's music," said Kit, going to the window. "Try to follow me; I mayn't stick to the score."

Agatha struck a few notes and Kit's bow touched the strings. He used double stops and the strange chords disturbed Evelyn. When the chords melted in melancholy arpeggios she set her mouth. She felt the man who stopped the strings was a man she did not know, and she liked to think she knew her lover. She was very quiet. All were quiet, for Kit's playing on the terrace was justified. The music was not for the Victorian drawing-room, but it harmonized with the dark woods and throbbing river. By and by Kit turned to the others and laughed.

"Well? Do you like it?"

"I do not," said Mrs. Carson. "What did you play?"

"A Spanish muleteer's song, but I expect the air was known in the desert before the Moors conquered Spain and the singers were vagabond

Bedouin. The people who built Netherhall and planted the oaks would not have much use for music like that."

"I expect that is so," Mrs. Carson agreed, and added meaningly: "Your business is to build ships."

"Oh, well," said Kit, "the strongest ships we build are soon out of date, but Netherhall has stood for three hundred years. In the morning the Bedouin strikes his tent and drives his camels to another well. The muleteer loads up his wine-skins and takes the road. He has no house; I dare say the mules are a moneylender's, and all he owns he wears. All the same, he sings and sometimes he dances. . . ." He signed his sister. "Let's try the Sevillana."

Agatha touched the piano and Kit began to play. He plucked the strings, and when he used the bow the double stops rang like harmonized guitars. Evelyn felt moved to dance and calm was rather hard. The music was exotic and marked by a touch of melancholy, but it fired her blood. As a rule, she hated to be moved, and she wanted Kit to stop. By and by he did so and carried his violin to the drawing-room.

"Thank you, Agatha; they have had enough," he said, and laughed a careless laugh. "I don't know about my playing, but the bow I bought is good. A straight stick and a fine spring; the old Frenchman knew his job."

Agatha Carson came down the iron steps. She was tall and went quietly, but she was sister at a famous hospital, and her calm carried a hint of command.

"Your composer's mood is strange, Kit," she said.

"I expect his mood was his ancestors' mood and they were romantic vagabonds. You get a sense of a sombre background, but it did not bother them. They owned nothing; so long as they could sing and dance, they did not want much. Perhaps their philosophy was sound."

"It is not our philosophy, and poverty is not a joke," Mrs. Haigh remarked.

"To see the joke implies some pluck," Kit agreed. "Spaniards and Moors are fatalists; but I expect you feel one ought to be resigned. One ought to fight for all one can get?"

"The Anglo-Saxons are gatherers and builders," Mrs. Carson observed. "Our aim is permanence and stability. The things we get we make better. For example, Netherdale was a dreary bog, but we turned the floods by dykes; we drained and planted and built——"

"Your work stands," said Jasper Carson. "Netherdale's a noble monument, but it cost three hundred years' effort. Something of a job!"

Evelyn looked up, for she had not heard Jasper arrive. He leaned against the wall and smiled, but she knew his humor was generally stern.

"Sometimes the Anglo-Saxons used another plan; they took the goods others gathered," he resumed. "At the beginning Frisians and Danes sharpened their battle-axes and drove the long galleys for the Humber and the Wash. In later days their descendants steered for the Spanish Main. The tradition is, Netherhall folk bought ships, and although they car-

ried little abroad, they brought rich cargoes back. Perhaps Kit is their type; I doubt if he's a gatherer."

"Kit does not spring from Netherhall stock," said Mrs. Carson.

"It is rather evident," Jasper agreed.

Alan looked up, as if he were annoyed. "All the same, he's my nephew and when he's not at the shipyard Netherhall's his home." He gave Kit a friendly touch. "You know that, my lad!"

"I have known it since I knew you, sir."

"Oh, well," said Alan, "when people philosophize I get bored and I think I'll go for a drink. Are you coming, Jasper?"

Jasper remained, and by and by Mrs. Haigh and Mrs. Carson went to the house.

"Alan is not a philosopher; he's a country gentleman," Jasper remarked and gave Agatha a smile. "Mrs. Carson's rules are not yours and Kit's?"

"Ah," said Agatha, "some get, but some must give."

"At the shipyard one does not get much," said Kit. "Unless they soon promote me, I think I'll start off with my fiddle, like the old minstrels."

"Your talent for music was your mother's gift," Jasper remarked. "The Carsons hammer iron, and to use the hammer hardens one. Perhaps Agatha has inherited something of the vein; I don't yet know about you."

He and Agatha went off, and Evelyn knitted her brows.

"You are rather puzzling, Kit, and your uncle's very queer."

"He's a grim old fellow, but we won't bother about him," Kit replied and put his arm round her.

"Oh, Kit, you ought not——" said Evelyn, and looked about.

Kit said nothing. He laughed and kissed Evelyn.

CHAPTER IV

THE CALL

FOR a week, Kit was happy at Netherhall. Although he liked to joke and sometimes music carried him away, he had sober ambitions. Kit was modest, but his modesty was not exaggerated and he thought his efforts to some extent accounted for the *Mariposa's* doing all her builders claimed. Then, although frankness was not Jasper Carson's habit, he owned himself satisfied. Mrs. Carson was gracious, and Kit thought it important that Mrs. Haigh left him and Evelyn alone.

Ledward's arrival, however, annoyed Kit. Ledward was Mrs. Carson's relation and rather a handsome fellow, but he began to get fat and Kit thought him sleek. Although he had not much money, he was not forced to follow an occupation, and when town bored him he visited at Netherhall. At Oxford he was famous for his scholarship and debating skill; his talk was interesting and he was an accomplished philanderer. In fact, there was the trouble, since Kit imagined Harry tried to interest Evelyn. For all that, so long as the trout fishing was good, Kit did not bother. Evelyn was a sport, but to wade

about angry pools and crawl under branches had not much charm for Harry.

Kit and Evelyn returned one afternoon from an excursion to a tarn some distance off, and although Kit's basket was not full his mood was buoyant. They had caught some trout and picnicked on the moor. After the noisy shipyard, the spaciousness and calm were bracing, and Evelyn was kinder than Kit had known. When they reached the gate at Netherhall they saw a group about the tea-table under a copper beech on the lawn, and Kit pulled out his watch.

"Four o'clock. Did you know?"

Evelyn did know, but she saw Kit did not.

"When one is happily engaged, one does not bother about the time," she said and smiled. "Until the sun got bright, the trout rose nobly."

"Ah," said Kit, "I did not bother about the trout. So long as you were not bored, I was content to loaf and talk."

"One can talk on the lawn," Evelyn remarked.

"That is so. The drawback is, when one finds a quiet, shady spot somebody arrives. In fact, I begin to feel Harry, so to speak, is ubiquitous, but he has not much use for the climb to the tarn. Then to see the shadows sweep the hills and hear the wind in the heather was worth some effort. The day was glorious. Let's go back in the morning?"

Evelyn shook her head. "You don't know where to stop, Kit, and greediness is rash. If you got another day, it might not be glorious. But the others see us, and I want some tea."

They crossed the grass and Kit threw down his

creel by Mrs. Carson's chair and pushed back his cap. His unconscious pose was firm and somewhat alert; his eyes sparkled joyously. Agatha thought him vivid; it was perhaps the proper word, but her calm glance got disturbed. She knew much about pain and suffering, and Kit could not escape man's common inheritance. So far, he was marked by a careless happiness, but he must face trouble, and she wondered. Mrs. Haigh studied Evelyn, but saw nothing to account for Kit's satisfaction. Evelyn's look was rather tired.

"Was the fishing good?" Mrs. Carson asked.

"Pretty good," said Kit, and opened his basket.

"Troutlings! The best is hardly four ounces," Ledward remarked. "You are a queer fellow, Kit. When there are big fish in a pool three hundred yards off, you climb the moor for things like these."

"The tarn is a long way off; perhaps that accounts for it. I expect you don't know the satisfaction going somewhere gives. Then the peat water was amber and silver, the yellow bent-grass shone, and the moors melted into glorious blue. Sunshine, line and color! When you get all that, you don't bother about fish."

"Evelyn waits for some tea, and you might give me your cup," said Mrs. Carson. "A telegram for you arrived two or three hours ago. Perhaps you ought to see what it is about."

Kit sat down and when he tore open the envelope he frowned.

"They want me at the office. I must report to Colvin, the manager, at ten o'clock in the morning,

and he does not apologize for bothering me. If I dared refuse, I wouldn't go."

"Perhaps they want you to design a liner," Ledward remarked.

"The telegram does not indicate anything like that, but the fellow states he expects me to be there. Politeness would cost an extra twopence; they're a parsimonious lot," said Kit, and turned to Mrs. Carson. "Well, I suppose I must get the evening train. May I use the car?"

Mrs. Carson agreed, and soon afterwards Kit drove to the station. When he reached the town at the river mouth, he pulled out his watch, and after pondering for a few moments, started for Blake's flat.

The night was hot, shipyard and steel works smoke floated across the grimy houses, and the street was crowded. After the spacious moors and the calm at Netherhall, the noisy traffic jarred; Kit shrank from the smell of stale fish by the dark shops, and when he was stopped by the crowd coming from a glittering music hall he frowned. He had not bothered about things like that before, but he admitted he was annoyed. His glorious day had not ended as he had thought, and the manager's call was ominous. Blake, however, might know something about it, and Kit pushed savagely through the noisy groups that blocked the pavement.

When he got to the flat, Blake was not at home. Mrs. Blake said he had gone to a seaport where a dredger the company had built was at work. She forced Kit to stay for supper and he remarked that her appetite was not good. She pushed the plates

about nervously, and he thought her highly strung. When the meal was over, she rested her arms on the table and with something of an effort faced Kit.

"Now we must talk about the telegram. You don't know what Colvin wants?"

"I'm altogether in the dark," Kit replied.

Mrs. Blake's glance was searching, but he knew she did not doubt him.

"Then, I can give you some light. The opposition boat has run her trial and has beaten yours. She is half a knot faster, but that is not all. She gets up steam in a shorter time."

"It's awkward," said Kit, and frowned, for the news disturbed him. "Fast steaming's important, but I'm puzzled. Our boiler's famous, and we reckoned we had adapted it to the job. Robbins declared it would beat the other."

"Perhaps he didn't boast. Mr. Colvin reckons the other people's draftsman knew the improvements you had made, and used your plans."

"By George!" said Kit, and clenched his fist. "But it's impossible! We locked up the plans, and nobody but men we trust saw the boiler in the erecting shop."

"You don't yet see!" said Mrs. Blake in a trembling voice. "Colvin claims somebody at the drawing office copied the plans."

"His notion's ridiculous!" Kit declared, with a laugh, although the laugh was forced. "Colvin ought to know a respectable shipbuilding company doesn't bribe another's servants. Besides, he ought to know nobody at the office would take a bribe."

"All the same, he's convinced your competitors got

the plans. Tom was in his private room for half an hour. Colvin was furious——"

Kit set his mouth. The thing was awkward, but he saw Mabel waited and he felt she expected him to be frank.

"One sympathizes with Colvin, but he's a fool. Old Robbins is altogether trustworthy and was at the yard when the company was floated. If we leave him out, only Tom and I could get at the drawings."

"Colvin argued like that, Kit. There's the trouble!"

"Now I do see," said Kit, in a hoarse voice, and looked at Mabel hard.

Her face got red, and then her color went. Kit thought she blushed for her husband, and he knew her afraid. She pulled straight the tablecloth and pushed back a plate. Her pose was stiff but her hands shook.

"Only you and Tom," she said. "It's rather horrible, Kit!"

For a minute or two Kit was quiet and he looked about the room. Although the furniture and ornaments were cheap, they had cost stern self-denial. Mabel loved her home and to let it go would hurt, but if Blake were forced to leave the office, they could not stay at the flat. Tom would not get another post and to reckon on his invention's supporting him was rash. Kit saw Mabel doubted Tom, but although he thought her ashamed, she was somehow resolute. Kit was sorry for her and humiliated for his friend.

Brooding unhappily, he saw a fresh light, and thought he could account for Mabel's resolution. In

fact, he wondered whether he had not been very dull. Perhaps she was entitled to think for her husband; but suppose she soon must think for another? A woman's instinct was to fight for her child. Unconsciously he looked up. Mrs. Blake blushed and turned her head, and he knew his supposition accurate. Kit's mouth got very tight. If the company had been cheated, Mabel must not pay.

"When will Tom be back?" he inquired.

Mrs. Blake said she did not expect him for two or three days; the dredger's machinery did not work properly, and Tom and a foreman must find out the defect. Kit got up, and although the effort was hard, he smiled.

"Since Colvin gave Tom an important job, he obviously does not think he copied the plans. When he knew our boat was beaten he got savage and felt he must hit out, but he's not a bad sort, and when I see him in the morning I expect to put all straight. Anyhow, you mustn't bother. Colvin will soon admit Tom is not the man."

Mrs. Blake gave him her hand, hesitated for a moment, and then let him go. The door shut, but the panels were thin, and Kit, in the passage, heard uneven steps and a chair crack. Then a plate jarred and he knew Mrs. Blake had thrown herself down in the chair and stretched her arms across the table. Kit pictured her bent head and her slack body. Sometimes perhaps he indulged his imagination, but he knew the picture accurate, and his look got stern.

When he reached his lodgings he lighted his pipe and reflected with grim humor that one ought not to talk about a glorious day until the day was gone.

All the same, it was not important, and he pondered moodily. To begin with, Blake had paid his debt and stated he was sorry he had not taken his model to Allinson before. Moreover, the money he gave Kit had melted, and Kit imagined his relations at Netherhall had remarked his extravagance.

Tom stayed late at the office, and sometimes Kit went across to the boiler shop. Then somebody left an eraser on Kit's drawing-board, and the eraser was Tom's. Kit recaptured other incidents he now thought significant, and weighing the evidence carefully, knew his friend condemned. The trouble was, Tom's wife must bear his punishment. Their relations were poor and shipbuilding was very slack. Tom would not get another post and his invention might carry him nowhere. If the engine worked, somebody would use his model, and Tom and Allinson must enforce their claims. A dispute about a patent was a slow and expensive business. Then before shipbuilders tried the machine some time must go.

Kit refused to picture Mabel and her baby in the streets. Yet the company had been cheated, and somebody must pay. He was not going to think about his relations; they must take the knock, but it looked as if he had not thought much for Evelyn. Well, it was done with. He had promised to put all straight, and his word went. Evelyn knew him, and he had not thought they could marry for some time. He was young, and if he could not get a post in England, he must emigrate. In the Dominions an engineer was a useful man.

Kit knocked out his pipe, stretched his arms as if he were tired, and resolved to go to bed. Now he thought about it, he was tired, and his brain was dull, but he began to see his line, and that was something. He went to bed and was soon asleep.

CHAPTER V

KIT PLAYS UP

AT ten o'clock in the morning, Kit went quietly into the manager's office. Perhaps it was strange, for until he talked to Mrs. Blake he had not faced a crisis, but he was calm. His rather boyish carelessness had vanished; his glance was steady and his step firm.

The chair Colvin gave him faced the window. Kit had expected something like that, and had thought to be embarrassed, but he was not. Meredith, the director who had talked to him about Jasper Carson, Colvin and Robbins, the head draftsman, occupied chairs at the table. Kit waited.

He had undertaken to see Mrs. Blake out, and he meant to do so, but the game was intricate. To clear Blake was all he wanted; he was not forced to entangle himself. To convict him was the company's business.

For a moment or two he studied the others. Robbins was rather embarrassed, the manager's look was grim, and Meredith, in the shadow, rested his face on his hand. Kit thought the old fellow's arriving at ten o'clock significant. Although it looked as

if Colvin wanted a victim, Kit imagined Meredith would be just.

"You are punctual, Carson. I don't know if I altogether expected you," Colvin remarked, meaningly.

Meredith looked up, as if he did not approve, and Kit's eyes sparkled.

"My habit is to be punctual, sir."

"I don't know an occasion when Carson was not up to time," said Robbins, and Kit thought him glad to urge something in his favor.

"Very well," Colvin resumed, fixing his eyes on Kit. "I expect you know why I called you to the office?"

"Until I saw Mrs. Blake, I did not know."

"I doubt if Mrs. Blake was entitled to inform you," Colvin rejoined. "Well, when we got to work at the *Mariposa's* boiler, you approved the first plan. In fact, you claimed the alterations Mr. Robbins sketched would not give as good results?"

"That is so," said Kit, and Colvin turned to the others, as if he wanted them to note Kit's agreement.

"It looks as if your claim was justified. Mrs. Blake, no doubt, told you our competitors' boat has beaten the *Mariposa* and they used our boiler; but the pattern was the modified pattern we experimented with in the original plan. The plan you preferred!"

Kit saw where the other led. Colvin plainly meant to make him accountable.

"I suppose you have grounds to imagine the people did use our pattern, sir?"

"Our grounds are very good," said Colvin, dryly. "All our competitors did not use was a fitting we

patented. In fact, we are satisfied they got our plans——" He stopped and giving Kit a steady glance, resumed: "How did they get the plans?"

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"Do you imply that you're unable? Or that you're not willing?"

Kit did not hesitate. When he arrived at the office, he saw his line, and it did not lead to his declaring he had cheated.

"I don't *know,*" he said quietly.

Robbins gave him a reproachful glance. "You ought to help us, Carson. Our experiments cost the company much, and we must know whom we can trust. Very well; only you and Blake could get at the plans, and to make the drawings and calculations was your business. Don't you see you must be frank?"

"The business was mine," Kit agreed. "When I stopped work I locked the drawings in the cupboard."

"Sometimes Blake was late at the office. When you were there was he about?"

"Perhaps three or four times," said Kit. "All the same, he was not at my table; his is across the floor."

"Was he at your table in the daytime?"

"So far as I remember, not when I was engaged on the boiler drawings. Besides, when the others were at work he could not make notes and copies."

"I expect you see your clearing Blake implicates yourself?" Colvin remarked.

For a moment or two Kit was quiet. He knew Meredith studied him and Meredith knew Jasper

Carson. Colvin was resolved to punish somebody, but he had fixed on Kit only because he thought him the proper man. In fact, Kit imagined all were willing for him to vindicate himself. Well, Blake's eraser was in his pocket, and when he went to the boiler shop one evening and Tom was at the office he left his drawing-board on the table. When he came back, he heard steps, hurried steps he thought; but he was not going to talk about it. He had stated he did not sell the plans.

"Something like that is evident, sir," he said to Colvin.

"You admit it was awkward, if not impossible, for Blake to make a copy," Meredith remarked. "Since you see all it implies, your frankness carries weight; and we want to be fair. Do you urge nothing for yourself?"

"There's nothing for me to urge, sir. I have stated I didn't cheat you. That's all."

Colvin frowned. "Very well, we must weigh the evidence we have got, but you have not helped us much." He looked at Meredith, and resumed: "When we see the line we ought to take we will let you know."

Kit went out, and when he went through the office, looked straight in front and said nothing to the clerks. In the yard hammers beat and the riveters' forges glimmered among the ships. Kit was keen about shipbuilding and had been happy at the yard; and he stopped for a moment in front of the wicket in the big doors. He had known ambition and had thought to make his mark, but he felt when the wicket shut it would shut him out for good.

Mechanically he turned the handle and was in the street behind the high wall.

His train did not start for some time, and he went to Blake's flat. Mrs. Blake was at home; he knew she expected him, and he sat down on a little shabby couch. Now the strain was gone he was dull and slack. Mrs. Blake leaned against the table and he thought she trembled.

"Well?" she said.

Kit smiled. "All's straight and my news is good. Colvin and Meredith are satisfied Tom didn't copy the drawings."

"You satisfied them?" said Mrs. Blake in a hoarse voice. "Oh, Kit!"

"I wasn't forced to use much argument. The job was mine, and Tom had nothing to do with the boiler."

"But you didn't admit you sold the plans?"

"I did not," said Kit. "All I wanted was for Colvin to see he mustn't suspect Tom. Who did steal the plans is another thing, and my business is not to find out. If Colvin solves the puzzle, he's cleverer than I thought——"

He stopped, for although he had played up, his part was hard. It looked as if Mabel doubted Tom, but Kit did not really know. Anyhow, she would not let her husband down and he agreed that she ought not.

"But suppose Colvin thinks you the man? He'd refuse to take you back," she said.

Kit smiled, and his smile was easier, for he was now on ground he knew.

"After all, to leave the yard would not bother me

much. Shipbuilding gets monotonous and perhaps I have a talent for music. Anyhow, I like to play the fiddle, and when I'm in the vein, I'm not a bad clown. Labor's dreary and people like a joke and a merry tale; sometimes they reward the joker. Well, I think I'll copy the old minstrels and take the road with my pack and lute."

"To let a good post go is not a joke," said Mrs. Blake. "You must think soberly!"

"If Colvin has no more use for me, thinking won't help, and one can be sober when one is old. Then, if a musician's not foolishly modest he need not starve. A pal of mine in America got a good push off because he could play in the band. The town didn't pay the bandsmen, but somebody found them soft jobs. A soft job and leisure to study the drum or the cornet is about my mark."

Mrs. Blake smiled. When Kit joked one was forced to smile, but tears were near her eyes and her hands were not still.

"Oh, Kit!" she said, "your pluck is very fine!"

"I wonder——" said Kit. "On the whole, I think I'd sooner trust my luck. But I mustn't philosophize; I must get my train."

Mrs. Blake gave him his hat and stopped for a moment at the door.

"Evelyn is fortunate. You are stanch and true as the steel you used," she said, and kissing Kit, gently pushed him out.

When the train started, Kit, in a third-class smoking compartment, speculated about Mrs. Blake. She was a very good sort and her kiss had braced him. He thought she knew much, and perhaps she

knew all. Mabel was not shabby, but she was a woman, and her code was a woman's code. Her proper part was to stick to her husband and see him out; Kit thought she would not shrink.

Then he mused about Evelyn. Mabel declared she was fortunate but Kit doubted. If Colvin did not take him back, Evelyn would get a nasty knock. All the same, they were young, and Evelyn had known Jasper would probably send him to a Canadian engineering works. Now he might be forced to start for Canada sooner than they had thought, but since Evelyn knew he must go, it was perhaps not important. Kit fixed on Canada because the Carsons went to the Dominion, although he did not think he would take Jasper's help.

In the meantime, he resolved to say nothing. He did not yet know if Colvin meant to dismiss him. After all, he thought the manager saw it was possible somebody at the boiler shop had given the company's competitors a useful hint, and Kit reckoned on his making cautious inquiries about the workmen. On the whole, he imagined some days might go before Colvin saw his line, and he might admit that he was baffled. Kit was not hopeful, but there was no use in brooding.

When he arrived at Netherhall the afternoon was hot and Mrs. Carson and the others were on the shady terrace; but for Kit to see Evelyn was not about was some relief.

"You are soon back," Alan Carson remarked with a friendly smile. "I was afraid the manager might cut short your holiday."

"I may not get as long as I expected; I don't know yet," said Kit, and Mrs. Carson looked up.

Kit's voice was careless, but she thought carelessness cost him something, and he frowned. Mrs. Carson knew he was not the joyous young fellow who started for the shipyard the evening before, but she must not yet indulge her curiosity. Then Ledward gave Kit an interested glance.

"Well, did you get a fresh important job?"

"I did not," Kit replied rather grimly, for he sensed a sneer. "In fact, there was some trouble at the yard——" He turned to Mrs. Carson. "Where is Uncle Jasper?"

Mrs. Carson said Jasper was called away by a telegram, and Kit went to his room. He did not want to talk, and when tea was served he would meet Evelyn. Before he did so he must brace up, and to brace up was rather hard. If the company had no use for him, he ought perhaps to let Evelyn go. He frankly dared not think about it, and he tried to picture his relations' line.

Alan Carson was kind and might sympathize; he would know Kit had not cheated the shipyard company, but Mrs. Carson ruled her husband. She was old-fashioned, parsimonious and conventional, and Kit imagined she had not from the beginning approved his making Netherhall his home. At all events, if he went to Canada, she would be resigned. Her favorite was Harry Ledward.

Jasper was older than Alan, and Kit had thought he acknowledged his nephew's claim, but he was inscrutable and marked by baffling humor. His word

went, and people reckoned Jasper rich. Kit did not see his line, but he thought he saw Mrs. Haigh's.

Kit knew her frugal, calculating and ambitious. In fact, he had thought her allowing him to cultivate Evelyn strange. If he lost his post, he was persuaded she would force her daughter to break her conditional engagement, and Evelyn dared not rebel. Mrs. Haigh was firm. On the whole, Kit admitted she would be justified and he must agree.

He got up and went to the window. A servant carried tea to a table at a shady spot and he must go down.

CHAPTER VI

KIT TAKES A KNOCK

ALTHOUGH much rain falls at Netherdale, three or four days after Kit's return were fine, and he seized all the opportunity for enjoyment the good weather gave. When the west wind curled the tarn Evelyn and he went fishing; when the water shone like glass and motionless silver clouds dotted the tranquil sky they picnicked in the heather, and Kit felt he got nearer Evelyn than he had yet got. Sometimes she had baffled him, and he sensed a reserve he could not break. Now she was kind and frank.

For all that, he knew his mood was reckless and he doubted if he were honest. He felt like a gambler betting on a chance he could not estimate; he risked much, and if he lost he must pay. Moreover, for him to lose might cost Evelyn something; but he felt she would brace up. Kit knew she was not altogether romantic; he had remarked in her a shrewdly practical vein. Anyhow, the splendid days were going, and he resolved to take all they gave.

In fine weather, tea was served on the lawn at Netherhall, and Kit one afternoon joined the group round the table under a tree. The soft patter of the

leaves was soothing and one heard the river splash. Kit, sitting on a mossy bank, languidly looked about. Evelyn's dress and shady hat were white, but her hair was black. Kit saw her face in profile and thought it cut the dark green background like a delicate cameo. His sister faced him; Agatha's skin was white and her clothes were blue. One remarked her calm and quiet dignity. Mrs. Carson's thin face was rather pinched, and her clothes were old-fashioned, but somehow one knew her important. Alan Carson's red face harmonized with his rough, belted coat and knickerbockers. He was obviously a country gentleman; one knew that was all. Jasper and Ledward were in the shadow, and Kit thought the old fellow exotic; his was another type.

In the background, flower borders, smooth grass, pastures, and shady woods rolled down the valley to a blue and indistinct sweep of plain. Kit felt the group and the landscape harmonized. The people were the sort of people one reckoned to meet at an old-fashioned country house. All but Jasper were marked by a cultivated serenity, and the serenity had charm. Yet Kit knew they were not his sort, and he doubted if they were Jasper's. On a summer holiday he liked to be at Netherhall, but his business was where men sweated by the furnaces and engines throbbed. Then perhaps it was significant that Jasper's chair was outside the circle.

"You were not back for lunch, Kit," said Mrs. Carson. "Were you fishing?"

"The water was low and I went across the moor to Swinside Pike. At the cairn I loafed and smoked. The heather was soft, the moor was red and the

sky was very blue. In the distance the sea shone and I thought about the shipyard. On the whole, I was glad it was a long way off."

"But you are a shipbuilder and must soon go back."

Kit smiled. "You don't indulge me much! At the cairn I tried to see myself ruling an estate like Netherhall, and the picture was attractive. After the shipyard, to get up when I wanted and go shooting would be something fresh."

"A landlord's main occupation is to meet his bills," Alan Carson remarked. "The politicians sacrifice us to the manufacturers. They want cheap food and low wages. Our part's to pay the taxes."

"Food is not cheap," said Jasper. "You're monopolists, and although you ought to pay, you don't pay all you ought. When iron goes up, smelting companies build new furnaces and increased production cuts the price. When corn goes up you can't enlarge your farms; at all events, you don't. You'd like to stop competition and take your profit." He turned and gave Kit a smile. "You're not the landlord type and your chance of getting an estate is not good. It looks as if you must stick to your proper business."

"I must try, sir, but that's another thing. Draftsmen are rather numerous and shipbuilding is slack. Suppose the company lets me down? Do you think you could get me a Canadian post?"

"It's possible. Do you expect the company to let you down?"

"One doesn't know when one's luck may turn.

Then sometimes I'm ambitious, and ambitious Carsons go to Canada."

"I don't think Kit bothers where he goes. So long as he starts, he's satisfied," Evelyn remarked.

"Oh, well," said Kit, rather moodily, "if you're resigned to go when you're forced to go, it's something."

Mrs. Haigh gave him a keen glance, and began to talk, but Kit was quiet. The afternoon was hot and one got languid. Moreover, the post would soon arrive, and he was anxious.

By and by a servant carrying some letters crossed the grass, and Mrs. Carson gave Kit an envelope. He knew the company's stamp, and when he pulled out the letter his hand shook. Then for a few moments he looked straight in front.

"Have the shipyard people called you back?" Ledward inquired, and picked up a slip of paper. "You dropped something; it looks like a check."

"Thanks!" said Kit, and pushing the crumpled check into his pocket, turned to the others. "I'm not going back. The letter states the directors have no more use for me."

Although his heart beat he was cool. He saw the blood come to Evelyn's skin, and then she turned her head. Agatha's glance was steady, and Kit knew her stanch. He thought Mrs. Haigh pondered; Mrs. Carson was frankly annoyed.

"You're rather theatrical, Kit, but perhaps you'd like to tell us something more," said Jasper, and beckoned Alan. "Let's go for a smoke."

They crossed the grass to another bench, and Kit leaned against a tree a few yards off. Alan awk-

wardly stuffed his pipe, and Kit saw he was disturbed. Jasper's look was inscrutable, and he gave Kit a cigarette. Kit gave him the letter, and Jasper nodded.

"The secretary knows the rules. The company does not require your services and he encloses a check for a month's pay! Well, the communication does not carry us very far."

"There's his check!" said Kit, and tore the form. "Perhaps I'm extravagant, but I don't see myself using their money."

"Sometimes to let yourself go is expensive," Jasper remarked. "However, I imagined you were going to give us your confidence."

Kit frowned and his pose got stiff. The lines of his athletic body were youthful, but he faced the others steadily and his look was stern. Alan was puzzled. He knew Kit's cheerful carelessness, and had thought to see him embarrassed, but the lad was marked by something of Jasper's calm. In fact, he looked like Jasper. Kit narrated his interview with Colvin and Meredith. He saw Jasper was interested, but that was all, and when he stopped the old fellow lighted a cigarette.

"Since it looks as if the company's competitors copied the boiler, I rather think Colvin's annoyance is logical. You declared you had nothing to do with it?"

"That is so, sir. I was some time at the yard, and I thought Colvin ought to know me."

"A big company's manager does not take much for granted. You were content with a plain denial? You did not try to indicate who was accountable?"

Kit hesitated. He had said nothing about Blake and did not mean to do so, but Jasper was very keen, and Kit saw he noted his hesitation.

"I don't know, sir. Besides, it's possible the plans were not copied."

"Colvin does not seem to doubt," said Jasper dryly. "You were rather generous not long since!"

"It looks as if I were rash; but I didn't reckon on your imagining I used money I ought not have."

"I imagined others might argue that a draftsman's pay was small," Jasper rejoined, and gave Alan an ironical smile. "You agree it's possible?"

Alan's face got red, for he knew Mrs. Carson would argue like that.

"I'd bet all I've got on Kit's honesty!"

"Thank you," said Kit, and gave him a grateful look.

"Well, I expect you have told us all you think it useful for us to know," Jasper remarked with some dryness. "In the morning I start for a steelworks on the coast, and if you like I'll look up Meredith. I might induce him to make a fresh inquiry."

Kit pondered. He had declared his innocence, and since he had engaged to see Mabel out, he must be satisfied. A fresh inquiry might put Colvin on Blake's track. He dared not risk it, but the strain was getting hard, and he was bothered by Jasper's searching glance.

"If you want to see Meredith, I am willing; but if he agreed to take me back, I would not go."

"Then I suppose you have a plan?"

"That is so," said Kit, and turned to Alan. "You

are kind and trust me, but others will not, and I mustn't stay at Netherhall."

"Netherhall's your home, Kit. You must stay here until you get a post."

Jasper looked up. "You're stanch, Alan, but perhaps you're rash. Then I doubt if Kit would get a post in England."

"I shall not try," said Kit. "As soon as I can find out about a boat, I'll start for Montreal."

"Your plan's a good one," Jasper agreed. "I expect my engineering friends in the Dominion would help——"

"You mustn't ask them, sir. In the circumstances, all I want is for my relations to leave me alone."

Jasper shrugged. "Very well. I like your pluck."

"My pluck's not all you think," said Kit and, turning to Alan, smiled, a rather dreary smile. "I don't dare face the others, and you might inform my aunt. Then I think Mrs. Haigh ought to know."

He went to the house. By and by he must enlighten Evelyn, but so long as the others were about he could not talk to her, and he frankly shrank from the interview. Although he could take a knock, to hurt Evelyn was another thing.

Alan returned to the tea-table. When he arrived Evelyn and Agatha were gone and Ledward went off. As a rule Ledward used some tact. Alan was embarrassed, and he awkwardly narrated all he knew. In the meantime, Mrs. Haigh saw Jasper in the shady path; he went slowly and his brows were knit. Mrs. Haigh was keen, and she had some grounds to think the grim old fellow would support his nephew. For all that, she imagined Kit and

the others doubted. Jasper Carson was rather baffling.

"I admit I am not very much surprised," Mrs. Carson remarked when her husband stopped. "Since Kit was called to the office, he has been restless and moody, and I thought him anxious. Then, although he jokes about his poverty, his presents were extravagant. One speculated where he got the sum——"

"Do you imply my nephew took a bribe to cheat his employers?" Alan asked.

Mrs. Carson smiled, a rather scornful smile. She was jealous, and she had not wanted Kit at Netherhall.

"The company was cheated; but perhaps Kit has accounted for his extravagance?"

"He got better pay."

"I imagine the company pays when the pay is earned, and Kit's money melts."

Mrs. Haigh looked up. She acknowledged Mrs. Carson's importance, but she had pondered, and she saw her part.

"One must not condemn Kit on the evidence we have," she said. "Besides, he declares he is innocent, and his word goes. I am persuaded the company is not just, and I feel Kit's friends ought to support him."

"If Kit will take my support, it's his," said Alan firmly.

Mrs. Carson colored and looked at Mrs. Haigh with annoyed surprise. Mrs. Haigh got up and smiled.

"Frankness has some advantages, and now you

know my point of view. But Evelyn has gone, and I expect you and Mr. Carson have much to talk about."

She went off, and Mrs. Carson mused.

"I wonder——" she said. "All the same, if Marion allows Evelyn to be entagled, she is a fool."

Some time afterwards, Agatha came to Kit's room. Kit stood by the window, and when he turned his head she saw his forehead was wrinkled and his mouth was tight. Agatha gave him a sympathetic glance.

"Of course, you did not sell the plans; but I suppose you cannot clear yourself?" she said.

"There is no use in trying. Colvin's determined to punish somebody, and I admit it looks as if he had the proper man."

"You have not yet told Evelyn. Are you afraid?"

Kit frowned. He knew Agatha did not want to hurt him, and as a rule she had an object for her remarks. Yet she did hurt. Now he was broken and done for, he acknowledged Evelyn was not for him, but he hated to think his disgrace would daunt her.

"Evelyn is ruled by Mrs. Haigh, and her line is plain," he replied.

"Yours is plain, Kit."

"My part's the conventional part, and I must play up. All the same, I see another; to face the risks and take the plunge. However, there's no use in talking. I must think for Evelyn——"

"Sometimes a rash plunge pays; but I doubt if it would pay with Evelyn. Evelyn is a charming

girl, but she is not the sort to run much risk. You must give her up, Kit."

"I'll try," said Kit. "It's going to be hard."

Agatha touched him gently. "For you to see you were selfish and your selfishness cost Evelyn much would be harder. You must take the knock. There is no other plan."

She went off, and Kit brooded. He thought Agatha did not urge him to be generous because, in the circumstances, generosity, so to speak, was conventional. Agatha did not follow old-fashioned rules, and she was not daunted by a risk. She wanted him to give up Evelyn, but not because others might think he ought. Agatha thought he ought. Well, Kit agreed, and he tried for resignation.

CHAPTER VII

EVELYN CONQUERS

THE red sunset shone behind the trees and the light was going. A lamp burned in Mrs. Haigh's drawing-room, and Kit, at the gate, smelt flowers and freshly mown grass. He had borne some strain, and now he must fight his hardest fight; he went slowly up the path.

In the east the sunset touched the moor's high top; the lower slopes were dusky blue. Across the clipped hedge the river shone with faint reflections and brawled across the stones. In the hedge was a nook and an old stone bench where Evelyn and Kit had talked on languid summer afternoons.

Kit had been happy in the garden, and although he was young he had felt something of its tranquil charm. Tranquillity, however, was not for him, and the happy days were gone. Soon he must go down the path, and he would not come back.

A white figure crossed the shadowy terrace and waved from the steps. Kit knew Evelyn watched for him, and when he advanced his heart beat. Evelyn put her hand on his arm and steered him to the bench. Kit stopped by the clipped hedge and

waited. All was quiet, and only the faint beam from the window marked the house.

"I know all, Kit," said Evelyn. "Alan Carson told mother."

Kit said nothing. Since Alan had enlightened Mrs. Haigh, he thought her allowing Evelyn to join him in the garden strange. He did not doubt she knew where her daughter went.

"The shipyard people are a shabby, unjust lot," Evelyn resumed. "Their thinking you dishonest is ridiculous. I'm glad you have done with them."

"I don't know if it's much comfort," Kit remarked with some dryness, for he dared not indulge the thrill he got. "Since Colvin has turned me down there's not much use in my trying for a post at another yard."

"But might not the company's competitors——?"

"No!" said Kit firmly. "If they employed me they'd expect to get some useful hints about the others' tools and models. Besides, it would look as if I had cheated and had got my reward."

"Oh, well, you're rather noble, but I'd like Colvin to pay. He has made you suffer, and I hate the fellow. But you musn't own you're beaten. We'll find a way out."

Kit hesitated. As a rule Evelyn maintained a baffling reserve. Now she talked as if he were her acknowledged lover and he got a hint of passion. Her voice trembled, and although the light was going he saw her color was high. Well, she was a girl, and for her sake he must be firm.

"In England I'm done for. Perhaps I could get

a Canadian engagement; I mean to see if it's possible."

"But if you go to Canada you may stay long."

"I may stay for good," said Kit drearily. "My relations think I've humiliated them, and I can't take their help. In fact, but for Alan I doubt if they're keen to help. Then Alan's money is his wife's, and Mrs. Carson will force him to leave me alone. She has, of course, some grounds——"

"When you're romantic I like you better," Evelyn remarked. "Not long ago you wanted to take the road and play the lute. Perhaps you didn't know you moved me then, but I was moved. Now you're horribly practical——"

Kit smiled, but his smile was forced. The fight was harder because he tried to observe rules that were not his. His habit was to trust his luck and follow joyous adventure. Yet all adventure was not joyous, and Evelyn had not known poverty.

"Sometimes one's forced to ponder," he rejoined. "I expect the minstrel's road is rocky, and when your road is awkward you ought to go alone."

"Ah, you're not logical. One can help another, and perhaps a woman's help is worth more than you think. Would you sooner start alone, Kit?"

"If I thought for myself, I'd carry you off. We'd steal away to Liverpool and sail by the first boat; but I'm not a fool. I don't see you going third-class, and I'd hate to see you use a room in a crowded tenement house."

"Do you think poor food and a shabby room very important?" Evelyn asked, and came near Kit. "Do you think I know nothing about frugality?"

"The frugality your mother uses is not hard to bear," said Kit, and indicated the beautiful garden. "There's your proper background: spaciousness and calm."

"I wonder——" said Evelyn quietly. "Perhaps you're not selfish, but it looks as if you did not want me very much."

Kit tried to be firm. He felt he took the proper course, and he had expected Evelyn to agree.

"You are all I want, but you mustn't pay for my selfishness. I'm broken and done for. Nobody in England would employ me——"

"But you will get a post in Canada. You have pluck and talent, and your luck will turn. I'm not afraid. Dare you risk it, Kit?"

"One must get to Canada, and then look for a post. All I've got is thirty pounds."

"I think I've got five pounds," said Evelyn, and began to laugh, a strange, dreary laugh. "If it wasn't tragic, it would be humorous! But you mustn't steal off and leave me. I'm not hard and firm like Agatha; I hate to be alone. If I let you go, you must solemnly promise——"

Her hoarse, trembling voice jarred Kit, and he put his arm round her. "Stop!" he said. "Your mother will hear you. Try for calm!"

Evelyn leaned against him and her body went slack. Kit was flesh and blood, and he kissed her and knew himself conquered. For a few moments she held him fast and then gently pushed him back.

"I'm not afraid, my dear; but if I cannot go with you, I'll wait until you send for me," she said, and

now her voice was level. "You will mend your fortunes, Kit, and perhaps it won't be very long——"

"To begin with, I must talk to Mrs. Haigh. I doubt if she'll consent."

"Ah," said Evelyn, "you don't yet know Mother."

Kit admitted he had not know Evelyn, and he was ashamed. She was splendidly loyal and although he had not thought her passionate she was passionate. Anyhow she had banished his scruples and given him confidence. For her sake he had tried to be cautious, but he really thought caution shabby. All the same, he did not expect Mrs. Haigh to sympathize.

Evelyn pushed back the long window, and since the ledge was high Kit gave her his hand. She gently urged him forward, and when he stopped and faced Mrs. Haigh she was at his side. Her color was rather high and her eyes sparkled, but although Kit was embarrassed he saw Evelyn was not. Mrs. Haigh looked up and her glance was not at all disturbed.

"Kit thought you ought to know I have promised to marry him as soon as he makes some progress in Canada," Evelyn said. "Perhaps it looks as if we're foolish, but Kit is clever and he's going to be famous."

"I expect I rather carried Evelyn away," said Kit. "In the circumstances, I know I ought not——"

Evelyn smiled. "Kit is very noble; he wants you to believe he persuaded me. Sometimes he thinks he's romantic, but he's really conventional. If he did persuade me, it was because I was willing."

For a moment or two Mrs. Haigh pondered.

"Which persuaded the other is not important. You are very rash," she said.

"We are young," Kit rejoined. "I have got an awkward knock, but I have time to recover, and people soon forget. When you're young you look ahead, and since Evelyn trusts me I know I can make good."

"I don't think your habit is to look far in front. Evelyn's engagement must not stand, but if you are fortunate in Canada I may agree to her marrying you, when you can support a wife. That is all, Kit, and I doubt if my promising as much is wise."

Kit had reckoned on Mrs. Haigh's antagonism, but she was kinder than he thought, and he gave her a grateful look.

"Thank you. Unless I do make progress I will not claim Evelyn; but I'll make all the effort flesh and blood can to push ahead."

Mrs. Haigh studied him. Kit was a handsome, athletic young fellow and his attracting Evelyn was not strange. His pose was firm. One got a sense of confidence and resolution, and Mrs. Haigh felt he stood for hopeful, conquering youth. Yet it was not his charm that moved her. Mrs. Haigh was not moved by things like that.

"Something must be stipulated," she said. "I do not acknowledge an engagement, and you must not write to Evelyn as if you were her lover. I think a letter in three or four months must be all. Do you agree?"

"I dare not refuse. All the same, the stipulation's hard. Are you satisfied my word goes?"

Mrs. Haigh smiled. "Had I doubted your sincerity, I would have broken the engagement for good, but I did not doubt, and I know the shipbuilding company was not just. Well, since I trust you, you must play up."

"I'll try. After all, you go farther than I hoped," said Kit.

Kit stayed for dinner. At Netherhall he felt he was in disgrace, and where his relations were not frankly hostile they gave him a rather scornful pity. Mrs. Haigh, however, was kind, and her cheerful talk banished the strain he had for some time borne. She implied that he suffered unjustly and she expected him soon to vindicate himself. Kit did not remark her cleverness; he was flattered and grateful.

For all that, he was disturbed. Mrs. Haigh was frugal, but her frugality was not conspicuous. Kit noted the good glass and china and the flowers in the tall silver stands. The lamps had rose-colored shades; the soft light fell where one wanted light, and where one did not there was restful gloom. The long window was open, and one smelt flowers. In fact, Kit thought the small dining-room a charming room.

The important thing was, Evelyn harmonized with all he saw. Cultivated tranquillity was her proper background, and if she married him she must go without refinements she valued. It would be long before he could give her a house like Mrs. Haigh's. When he thought about it, Mrs. Haigh's indulging him was rather remarkable, but he must not exaggerate. After all, he had some useful abilities, and although the fight might be long, he would win.

Evelyn went with him to the gate, and for a time they talked hopefully. When Kit got to Netherhall nobody but Agatha was about. She occupied a corner in the hall, and he believed she waited for him.

"You were at Mrs. Haigh's?" she said.

"That is so," Kit agreed in an apologetic voice. "When I started I meant to say good-bye to Evelyn, but when I saw her my resolution melted. Perhaps I was selfish, for Evelyn was splendid."

"You imply she means to stick to you?"

"She's stanch as steel," said Kit, and his eyes sparkled. "Sometimes I imagine you don't like Evelyn; but you don't know her. She doesn't hesitate and think for herself. Her pluck's fine."

Agatha's glance was cool and searching.

"And Mrs. Haigh? Does she approve?"

"At all events, she's resigned. Evelyn, however, does not engage to marry me; for Mrs. Haigh to allow it would be remarkable. I get my chance to make good, and if I do so, I may claim my reward. In the meantime that is all, but I feel it's much. Anyhow, your satisfaction isn't very marked."

Agatha got up and put her arm round his neck.

"You are all I've got, Kit, and I see obstacles," she said gently. "Yet you're not soon daunted, and Evelyn is fine. Well, now you have an object, you must fight hard, and I'll hope for your success."

Kit kissed her, and she went off. He saw she was not altogether satisfied, but he admitted she had not much grounds for satisfaction, and she was kind. He smoked a cigarette and went to bed.

In the morning he carried a newspaper to a bench in front of the house and began to study the steam-

ship advertisements. Soon afterward Jasper Carson came along the terrace.

"My sister-in-law is across at Mrs. Haigh's," he said. "I understand Evelyn means to stick to you."

"That is so, sir," Kit agreed.

Jasper gave him a queer look and his mouth went crooked, as if he were amused.

"Then Miss Haigh is nobler than I thought! I suppose she has not persuaded you to stay in England?"

"I am looking up the Montreal steamers."

"Very well. When I get back from the coast we must make some plans," said Jasper, and went down the steps.

Kit frowned. The old fellow's sneer annoyed him, and he resolved they would not talk about his plans In fact, when Jasper arrived Kit imagined he would be on board ship. He wanted nothing from his relations. Mrs. Carson thought him a wastrel, and it looked as if Jasper thought him a romantic fool.

Jasper joined Agatha in the garden and inquired: "What do you think about your brother's experiment?"

"On the whole, I don't approve," said Agatha in a quiet voice.

"Your habit's not to exaggerate," Jasper remarked. "I see you're disturbed. For whose sake are you disturbed?"

"For Kit's," Agatha replied.

Jasper nodded. "You're not a fool; my sister-in-law is a jealous fool, and we know Alan. Well, Kit's my nephew, and I'd be sorry to see him start wrong."

"I imagined something like that, but I doubt if Kit does," said Agatha calmly. "Have you some grounds to think his marrying Evelyn Haigh would be a wrong start?"

"She's her mother's daughter."

"Mrs. Haigh has some useful qualities."

"She has all the shabby, utilitarian virtues," Jasper agreed.

"Are some virtues shabby?"

"Don't you know?" said Jasper with a dry smile. "However, we mustn't philosophize. If Kit does marry Evelyn, I'd sooner she were like her father; Haigh was a humorous and rather generous wastrel. All the same, Kit is not yet married, and to get rich in Canada is harder than he thinks."

"But you could help!"

"It's possible. If my helping implies Miss Haigh's rewarding Kit, I'm not very keen. In fact, there's the trouble. Now perhaps you can account for my annoyance. I am annoyed, particularly since I want to be at Netherhall, but I must start for the coast."

"Kit is obstinately independent," said Agatha, and seeing Jasper pull out his watch, let him go.

CHAPTER VIII

KIT TUNES HIS FIDDLE

NEWFOUNDLAND was not far off, and a keen northwester sang in the *Falernian's* shrouds. Her lights swung with a measured heave and green halos shone and melted in the foam that leaped about her starboard bow. When the long rollers broke one felt the shock, but the big engines throbbed steadily and the keen bows thrust ahead. Sometimes a broken sea rolled across the forward well, and the spray from the plunging forecastle beat the navigation officers keeping dreary watch on the inclined bridge.

The *Falernian,* however, was large, and in the third-class saloon near the water line one hardly felt the deck planks heave, and the turmoil of the flung-back seas was dull and soothing. Benches and chairs were occupied, and a big red ensign hung like a curtain by the piano. The blue and white crosses reflected the electric light, and when the flag wavered in the draft it looked as if the Beaver carried the maple leaf across the crimson field.

A thin young man at the piano sang a song from the music-halls. His accent was the Lancashire accent and he struck wrong notes, but his audience

was not fastidious. The passengers wanted to be amused, for when one laughs one forgets. Kit, in the gloom behind the flag, fingered his violin. His turn was soon, and he thought a new string stretched.

People smiled, but he imagined the smiles were rather brave than humorous. He saw shabby clothes, careworn faces, and bent shoulders. In the back row a tired woman soothed a fretful child. Another leaned against her husband and held a handkerchief to her mouth. Her face was pinched, and Kit heard her straining cough; he doubted if the immigration officers would allow her to land. He saw young men and women, and some laughed, but for the most part their look was not joyous. A number were broken by war; others had borne dreary labor and grinding poverty. They were on board because they hoped in Canada their luck might turn.

The strange thing was, Kit thought they heard the Old Country call. In the morning they would see Newfoundland, and the *Falernian* would carry them up the St. Lawrence to the West optimistic advertisements declared was golden. Yet one does not gladly leave all one knows, and the stern Old Country was home.

By and by the music stopped, and a girl advanced. Kit had talked to Alison Forsyth and he gave her a smile. He thought her attractive, but he did not altogether know where was her charm. Although she was short, she carried herself well, and her neck and shoulders were strong; her hair and eyes were brown and her look was frank. Now she was obviously nervous, and when she put some music on the stand her color came and went. Then she

turned, and tilting her head a little, faced the audience. Although Kit saw her hand shake, her pose was firm.

He could not fix the tinkling prelude, but he thought it was not strange and the song was out-of-date. Then the girl began to sing, and he looked up sharply.

"Had I the wings of a dove . . ."

Although her voice was not cultivated, it was musical. Her intonation was good and she sang with feeling; in fact, Kit began to see she sang with emotion. He thought her rash. She was young, and it looked as if the music might break her control.

". . . I would flee,
Just for to-night to my own country."

Kit frowned and studied the groups in front. With a song like that one could carry them away, and Alison was doing so; but it was not the song he would have sung. Besides, he doubted if she could keep it up. Her voice shook on a top note, her skin got very white, and although her eyes shone they shone as if they were wet. She began another verse falteringly, and he knew she was going to stop. One could not trust the fellow at the piano to support her, and Kit lifted his violin.

"Go on! I'll carry you through," he said.

He drew the bow across the strings, and the harmonious chords gave her confidence. For a few bars he followed the melody, and then he knew she had got back her control, and he signed the accompanist to stop.

Alison's voice grew clear and firm, and Kit carried her triumphantly along. For an emigrants' concert,

she struck a risky note, but he had gone to her rescue and he must see her out. Besides, the verses moved him. He pictured the oaks at Netherhall, and Evelyn walking in the shade. Her white clothes cut the gloom, and behind the trunks the river sparkled.

Alison stopped, and for a moment all was quiet. Men looked straight in front. Some were stern and some indulged a gentle melancholy. A woman frankly cried. Then heavy boots beat the deck and a storm of noise swept the saloon. The noise did not stop, and Alison, flushed and highly strung, looked at Kit.

"No!" he said. "You mustn't risk it yet."

He went to the piano and struck a note, for the string had stretched.

"Miss Forsyth will sing by and by," he said, and began to play.

Not to bother about the piano was some relief. Kit was going to improvise and work on the reaction he knew would soon begin. Miss Forsyth had moved the emigrants to sadness; he must move them to hope by the marching song.

The first chords rang joyously, but the prelude sank. One heard the pilgrims start, some distance off. Kit's fingers were busy on the strings, but his eyes were fixed on the rows of faces. Unless the others heard all he heard, his effort was lost. He saw they felt for his meaning and wondered where he led; and then the puzzled looks began to vanish. The audience was going with him. Tired and daunted people heard the beat of marching feet.

Perhaps Kit exaggerated, but he had feeling and

talent and he let himself go. He must banish the others' moodiness and his own; he and they steered West, where better fortune was, and all must push ahead. He frankly used all the tricks he knew, but the emigrants were not critical, and the march fired their blood. The music got loud, as if it marked a triumphant advance, and then Kit took the fiddle from his neck. The others went where he wanted, and he knew where to stop.

People shouted and beat the tables, but Kit vanished behind the flag, put up his fiddle and started for the deck. At the rails by the ladder to the forward well he stopped. The spot was high, and across the well he saw the forecastle heave and plunge. Long, white-topped seas rolled up from the dark, broke against the bows, and melted in foam. Spray leaped up, blew like smoke, and beat the screens on the bridge. There was no moon, but the stars shone, and the combers' broken tops cut the gloom. Kit felt the ship heave along, and to know he was going somewhere and went fast carried a thrill. The music had braced him and his heart beat with hope. In the West his luck would turn, and Evelyn was stanch. He began to think about her with romantic tenderness.

After a few minutes he saw he was not alone. Somebody leaned against the rails under a lifeboat, and he thought the figure was a girl's. She turned her head, and Kit advanced.

"Miss Forsyth? I thought nobody was about. Why did you not speak?"

"In the dark I didn't know you," Alison Forsyth replied. "Then I rather wanted to be alone."

Kit thought her voice trembled. Brisk steps beat the deck overhead and he heard a woman's careless laugh. The first-class passengers walked about and joked, and, by contrast, the girl was forlorn.

"Oh, well," he said, "I was going——"

"Now I do know you, you needn't go," Alison replied with some embarrassment.

Kit laughed. "An unconscious compliment carries weight, and I'd rather stay. Then, if you're downhearted, perhaps you oughtn't to be alone."

"I was rather downhearted," Alison admitted. "You see, my nerve wasn't all I thought. I knew I was going to be ridiculous. In a moment or two I must have stopped; and then you came to help——"

"If you were bothered because you hesitated, you were ridiculous. Your song was a triumph."

"The triumph wasn't mine, and when you played the march I was ashamed. I felt I was afraid for nothing."

Kit saw her mood was emotional. She was young and, so far as he knew, she had no friends on board the crowded ship. It looked as if her loneliness weighed, and to talk might cheer her.

"After your song, my march was perhaps a contrast, but a contrast, so to speak, is not a contradiction. To be sad because something you loved is gone is human; but it's human to brace up and look for better luck. You did brace up nobly. All the same, I didn't play to cheer you; I myself was doleful."

"Ah," said Alison, "in a way, my nearly stopping was not important, but I thought it ominous. It

looked as if I'd started on an adventure I couldn't carry out."

"The adventure was your starting for Montreal?"

Alison hesitated, but her loneliness weighed, and somehow she trusted Kit.

"Yes," she said. "You see, I wasn't altogether forced to go. My father and mother are dead, but my relations in the North wanted me to join them. Until trade got slack I was at a manufacturer's office, and then I couldn't find another post. I wanted to go to Whinnyates, but I knew if I went and helped my aunt I might stay for good. Whinnyates is a small moorland farm."

"But if you were not happy at Whinnyates, when business was better you might have gone back to the town."

"I doubt——" said Alison thoughtfully. "One is soon forgotten and one forgets one's job. Whinnyates, at the dalehead, is very quiet; you only see the sheep on the fellside and the cattle by the beck. A rock shuts in the valley and old ash-trees hide the house. At a spot like that you get slow and perhaps you get dull. You think about the dairy and the calves, and until dark comes work must go on. At a modern office they do not want a girl whose back is bent by turning the churn."

"Have you turned a churn?"

Alison smiled. "My father was a small farmer in the bleak North. The soil is barren and one must fight floods and storms; but somehow when one knows the moors one does not go away. Well, I was afraid; I wanted to be where people traffic and life is thrilling."

"All the the same, to-night you felt Whinnyates called?"

"I expect I wasn't logical, but in summer, when the wind drops and the fern is long, Whinnyates is a charming spot. While I sang I saw the hills get dark and my aunt by the fire; the rough-haired dogs, and my uncle on the oak bench. They're kind, blunt folks. I knew they thought about me, and I wanted to be back."

"In some respects you are luckier than I am. I believe my relations are glad I went. But are you joining friends in Canada?"

"I have a friend at a Manitoba town, and she thinks I might get employment."

"You are going to do so. So long as you're not daunted, you'll get all you'd like to get."

Alison smiled, for Kit's talk was bracing. "You are very hopeful, but as a rule one must be resigned to go without. For example, I wanted, just for once, to walk about the first-class passengers' deck."

"Then let's go; it's pretty dark," said Kit, and gave her his arm.

They went up a ladder and round the spacious deck, but the wind was keen, and Kit steered Alison to a nook behind a boat. Two or three people occupied the sheltered spot, and by and by a steward, carrying a tray, came along the deck.

"Grilled sardines and toast, sir? Prawns is off," he said to a man in the group.

"The company doesn't pander to our appetites," Kit remarked to Alison. "Do you like grilled sardines?"

The steward turned his head and Alison's heart beat, but the adventure was intriguing and she felt Kit would not let her down. Kit beckoned the man.

"Two portions, please! Have you coffee?"

"Coffee's not served after dinner. I might, perhaps——"

"Never mind; we musn't break the rules," said Kit. "Bring the sardines."

The steward went off, and when he returned he carried two plates. Alison took her plate. Kit had banished her moodiness, and although she doubted if she ought to agree, his ordering a first-class passenger's supper was something of a joke. After a time she got up, and he put a coin on a plate.

"I'm not scrupulous about cheating a steamship company, but one ought not to cheat a steward," he remarked. "Then, since he reckons on getting his tips at Montreal, he'll speculate about our generosity, and he may see the joke. Unless the other sees it, a joke has not much point."

They stole away, and at the bottom of the ladder Alison laughed.

"Your code's elastic."

"Oh, well," said Kit, "I don't know if one is justified to rob the rich, but one ought not to rob the poor. Anyhow, in the old romantic days it was supposed to be the rule. Now perhaps it's out of date; but since I'm starting off with my fiddle like the ancient minstrels, I must play up. Well, you remarked my bluffing the steward, and the motto is: When you undertake an adventure, you mustn't hesitate!"

They were opposite a light, and Alison gave him a grateful look.

"Ah," she said, "my hesitation's gone! You gave me back the pluck I lost. But we have stayed for some time, and you said I would sing again."

CHAPTER IX

THE ROAD TO THE WEST

DUST rolled about the jolting cars and sifted through every opening. Cinders rattled on the roofs and the long train noisily followed the river. Although the afternoon was hot, a stove burned in the compartment at the back of the Colonist car, and Alison waited for a tin kettle to boil. Kit leaned against the partition and entertained two children by pulling a bootlace through a knot.

"Why, that's just too cute!" one exclaimed, and seized Kit's hand. "You held on to both ends, but you pulled another through the loop. How'd you fix it?"

"Ah," said Kit, "there's the puzzle! You see, a bootlace only has two ends."

The other child laughed. "A bootlace? Don't you know it's a shoe-string?"

"I forgot," said Kit. "I reckon sometimes it's a shoe-tie. When you come to think about it, the proper name's important. People go by names——"

"You talk queer. Say, where was you raised?"

"A conjurer's habit is to talk. When you want folks to think a thing is something it is not, high-faluting language helps. Magicians, politicians and

company floaters know the trick. However, if you fix your eye on the shoe-string, I expect you'll see it's got four ends."

"You're surely smart," the child remarked. "But where was you raised?"

"I doubt if I was raised; I rather think I was allowed to grow up," Kit replied in a sober voice. "Anyhow, I grew up at an old house by a wood in England. A river went by the wood and the trees were planted three hundred years ago. The fairies like old trees, and when the moon was full they played about and rang the bluebells for music. If you got up early in the morning, you saw the rings where they danced. Now perhaps you know why I'm a conjurer."

"My teacher allowed the fairies and spooks and ha'ants was gone. She reckoned they couldn't stand for locomotives and flivvers."

"Well, I expect we have fired out the haunts and their rattling chains; but the fairies are not yet out of date. Although you can't see them, sometimes you hear their music; in fact, when music is very good, I think the fairies play. However, we'll try a fresh experiment with the magic shoe-string——"

A man carrying a frying-pan pushed back the door.

"You mustn't let the kiddies bother you," he said, and turned to Alison. "I don't want to hustle you, but when you're through at the stove I'll get busy."

"Let him use the stove; I'd sooner you didn't roast yourself," said Kit. "The train stops at Ottawa, and we'll get some food at a restaurant."

Alison smiled. "In a moment or two the water

will boil, and we agreed to get our meals on board. Then we bought the kettle, the tin plates, and a quantity of groceries, and in order to get our money back the things must be used."

"People talk about women's extravagance!" Kit remarked. "The women I know are parsimonious."

The passenger who carried the frying-pan grinned. "You're young, but I guess you know them, and your dame's plan's all right. When you want a cheap eat, eat on the cars. If you get off at a meal-station, they hand you red-hot hash and shout *'All aboard.'* Well, I been married some time, and my motto is: If you want to pay off your mortgage, the dame must keep the wad."

Kit thought Alison blushed, but she turned her head.

Alison brewed some coffee and Kit carried the pot to a second-class car. A porter fixed a board for a table, and Alison, unpacking a basket, began to cut sandwiches. Kit, until she stopped him, extravagantly opened packets and cans. They had agreed to share expenses, and Alison found that Canadian fruit and canned goods were cheaper than she had thought. Kit said nothing, for he had flagrantly cheated.

Lunch was a cheerful function. The coffee was good and all Alison put on the tin plates was appetizing. Kit felt the meal was not a picnic; it was a feast. Then, although dust and locomotive cinders blew about, Alison's clothes were not stained, and her hair was smooth and bright. In the hot and dusty car, she looked strangely fresh and clean.

When the meal was over she carried off the plates

and repacked the basket. Nothing was left about. Kit noted her fastidious neatness, and admitted that their housekeeping was marked by an intriguing charm. It was not altogether because he liked to lunch with an attractive girl; Alison gave the meal a friendly, homelike touch he had not known at Netherhall. Yet she was not a sentimentalist. Only when she sang about the Old Country had he thought her romantic. She was frank and cool and, so to speak, capable.

The train followed the river. Dark pines, zigzag fences, wooden farmsteads and silo towers rolled by the windows. One saw shining water, and in the distance faint blue hills. Sometimes Kit studied a newspaper and Alison sewed. Sometimes they talked and watched the landscape speed by.

"Does the Canadian news interest you?" Alison inquired.

"The advertisements interest me, but so far nothing's doing," Kit replied. "Somebody wants a man for a drygoods store and another who can sell patent medicines is required. Well, I cannot. Perhaps it's strange, but, as a rule, men who make things can't persuade folks to buy. Nobody wants a minstrel. Gramophones and electric organs have knocked us out. If I were rich, I'd have bought the organ at the Montreal restaurant and wheeled it to the St. Lawrence in order to see it splash."

Alison smiled. She liked Kit's humor, but sometimes she thought he did not altogether joke.

"Until you're famous, I expect music doesn't pay. Haven't you another occupation?"

"One doesn't start by being famous, but until you

are famous you're not allowed to start. The critics are not logical," said Kit. "Well, perhaps I do know something about machine tools, and if the railroads are building bridges and water-tanks, I might get a job. The Carsons' business is to hammer iron. If you don't mind, Ill turn up the commercial news."

He folded the newspaper and Alison resumed her sewing. By and by the conductor came along the passage and asked for their tickets.

"Your company's generous," Kit remarked. "My ticket's a foot long. If I was going to the Pacific, I expect you'd give me a yard."

"Something like that," the conductor agreed. "If you haven't a slip for each division, you're put off the cars!" He turned to Alison. "I reckon you want a sleeper berth?"

"Of course," said Alison, but a train hand came from the vestibule and beckoned the conductor.

"See you again," he said and went off.

In the afternoon the train stopped at Ottawa, and when dusk began to fall, Kit, in a corner of the smoking compartment, watched the Ontario woods roll by. Dark pines cut the red sunset, but the woods were broken, and rivers, streaked by tossing rapids, pierced the gloom. Sometimes Kit saw a lake shine with faint reflections and melt. A light wind blew through the compartment and carried the smell of pines. By and by a porter lighted the lamp, and Kit got up. He thought he would see if Alison had got her berth.

When he opened the door he noted that the porter had let down the higher shelves and pulled the curtains. For the most part, the passengers had gone

to bed, and the fellow was arranging two or three lower berths between the seats. Alison sat by a window and Kit thought her disturbed. Her folding ticket was on the seat, and when she took a thin roll of bills from her wallet she frowned.

"Hello!" said Kit. "Hasn't the fellow fixed your berth?"

"He wants a ticket. At the steamship office they stated that sleeping accommodation was supplied on board the trains."

"That is so," said Kit, who began to see a light. "The conductor's not about, but if you wait a few minutes, I expect to put all straight."

He went off, but he did not look for the conductor. When he reached the smoking compartment he pulled out some paper money and knitted his brows. He had been extravagant, his wad had melted, and he did not know when he would get a job. All the same, he imagined Alison's wad was smaller than his, and he understood her embarrassment.

On the Colonist cars sleeping accommodation, of a sort, is supplied without charge; on board the other cars one must, as usual, buy a ticket for a berth, but Alison had not reckoned on paying more. Sometimes to go to bed on board a second-class car is awkward, and Alison was fastidious. For her to use a Colonist car, crowded by foreign emigrants, was unthinkable. Well, Kit had cheated her about the lunch basket and he must cheat her again. He pulled out his sleeper ticket, but since Alison imagined he looked for the conductor, he resolved to wait for two or three minutes.

The train stopped, and Kit, going to the vestibule,

saw a water tank, a few indistinct houses and the station agent's office. In the background were dusky woods, and he heard cowbells chime. The guard rail on the car platform was open, as if somebody had got down. Then a man coming from the next car pushed past. His step was uneven, and he lurched against the door. Kit wondered whether he was drunk, but he turned the handle and vanished.

After a few moments somebody waved a lantern, the bell tolled, and the cars jerked forward. In the quiet dark, the locomotive's explosive snorts rang like cannon shots; the train was heavy, and Kit thought the track went up hill. He, however, must rejoin Alison, but when he reached the car he stopped.

A man leaned over the seat Alison occupied. She faced the stranger, but he blocked the passage between the benches and she had not got up. The other passengers were in their berths behind the curtains, wheels rolled, and the locomotive labored noisily up the incline. The fellow certainly was drunk and carried a pocket flask and a shining cup. It looked as if he urged Alison to take the cup, for her face was red. Then she saw Kit, and her relief was flattering.

Signing her to be quiet, Kit advanced noiselessly. The stranger looked the other way, and Kit stopped a few yards off. To disturb the passengers by an angry dispute would embarrass Alison, and he doubted if the other would weigh a logical argument. Then the fellow tried to push the cup into Alison's hand.

"The stuff's all right. Fine club whisky; I got it

at Quebec. They've no use for Pussyfoots down the river."

"I hate whisky," said Alison in a quiet voice.

The other laughed. "Oh, shucks! You're playing shy. Anyhow, you got to sample some. I took a shine to you." He stopped and the liquor splashed. "Leg-go. Who the——?"

Kit pulled him from the bench and turned him round. The man was big, but he was not steady on his feet and, since Kit was behind him, he could not seize his antagonist. Kit kept behind, and holding him firmly, pushed him to the door. They had not disturbed the passengers, but since he must disengage one hand, the door was an obstacle. When he let go, the other turned and drove the flask against his face. Although the knock was hard, Kit turned the handle, and the fellow plunged across the platform, got his balance, swore and came back. Kit had thought he would be satisfied to put the other out, but the blow had hurt and anger conquered him.

They grappled. The flask rolled under Kit's foot, and his antagonist knocked his head against the door. He began to think he had an awkward job, but he had played Rugby football and studied Cumberland wrestling. He tried for a proper hold and when he knew the hold was good made a savage effort. His antagonist let go, plunged down the steps, and vanished.

Kit, rather horrified, jumped for the bottom step, seized a brass loop and leaned out. The beam from the windows swept the ground by the track, and at the other end of the long train somebody got up and began to run awkwardly after the cars. Kit sat

down on the step and laughed, a rather breathless laugh. Although the train was not going very fast, he thought the other's luck was good.

"You're pretty hefty at a rough-house stunt," somebody remarked, and Kit saw the passenger who had waited for Alison at the stove.

"I don't think I meant to put him off," he said in an apologetic voice.

"Well, you put up a useful fight and I wasn't going to see you beat. When my kiddies were peeved and train-sick you helped them keep bright and they took a shine to you. I reckon you're not a tourist. What's your line?"

"I'd like to get on a bridge or tank-building job. I can use a fitter's tools."

"A construction company's putting a new bridge across Harper's Bar, and when I've dumped the kiddies, I expect to make the camp. The bosses know me, and if you look me up I might fix something. Ask for Jake Gordon."

"Thank you," said Kit, and the conductor and a train hand crossed the platform.

"Did you see the Montreal drummer?" the conductor inquired.

"I saw a pretty drunk man," Kit replied. "Do you want the fellow?"

"Sure! He was making trouble in a first-class sleeper; tried to pull out a passenger whose berth he claimed. Where's he gone?"

"He went down the steps," said Kit. "A minute or two since he was running after the train."

The train hand lifted his lantern and the conductor saw a red mark on Kit's face.

"Looks as if something hit you," he said meaningly.

"The drummer's flask. The knock accounts for his getting off the train."

"You put him off?" said the railroad man. "You have surely got some gall! Well, you've saved me trouble, and when he gets tired I reckon he'll steer for the depot."

He banged the door and Kit pulled his clothes straight and rejoined Alison.

"The fellow who bothered you is gone and I saw the conductor," he said, and gave her his sleeper ticket. "The porter's coming and will make up your berth. Good-night!"

Alison thanked him, and he went along the train to an emigrant car. Pulling a shelf from the roof he climbed up and folded his coat for a pillow. The polished shelf was hard and Kit had no rug, but he was young and the night was hot. The roll of the wheels got soothing and died away, and he was asleep.

CHAPTER X

A REST BY THE WAY

THUNDER rolled across the woods, but the lake sparkled in the sun. A light wind ruffled the shining surface and dark-blue smears broke the silver reflections. For three or four hundred yards the dusty cars curved along the bank, and the locomotive pump's sharp throb pierced the languid splash of water.

Not far from the engine the track was cut. Gravel and ties and rails had gone down, and two broken freight cars blocked a swollen creek. Sweating, bare-armed men labored in the gap the flood had made. The shovels flashed and the gravel they threw about rattled noisily. Behind the train, rocks and woods rolled back to Hudson Bay.

Alison, under a slanted pine, occupied herself with some sewing. Kit helped the workmen who unloaded the broken cars, but by and by he climbed the bank.

"In Canada, the main thing is to get on a move. Economy's not important," he remarked. "I supposed they'd carry the undamaged goods back to the line, but the foreman's orders were to fire the blamed

stuff into the creek. It's now going in. I wonder whether the company will meet the bill."

"When do we start?" Alison inquired.

"They expect a construction train in two or three hours, but we may not get off for some time afterwards. Suppose we light a fire and picnic by the lake?"

Alison agreed, and he carried the basket along the line. The day was hot and groups of passengers sat on the car steps and lay about in the shade. For the most part their clothes were threadbare and dusty and their faces were lined. Kit thought they had known poverty in the countries from which they came, and after the stormy voyage they had sweated and jolted in the crowded Colonist cars. To rest by the way was some relief, and nobody was keen to resume the journey. In hot weather a Colonist car has drawbacks, and one gets train-sick.

Other groups loafed about the woods and picked wild berries. Where a smooth rock sloped down to the water, women washed clothes, and garments thrown down to dry dotted the stone. All but the children were quiet, and their shouts were spiritless. It looked as if a pilgrim caravan had stopped to rest in the lonely wilds. The locomotive pump and the noisy shovels struck a jarring, modern note.

Kit lighted a fire behind a rock and thin blue smoke floated across the water. The pine twigs snapped and one smelt the resin in the wood. In front, languid ripples beat the stones. Alison brewed coffee and unpacked the basket.

"Our stock gets low, but it ought to carry us to

Winnipeg," said Kit in a sober voice. "I expect another meal is all we'll need."

Alison gave him a quiet glance and then looked in front. Kit's brows were knit, and she admitted she was melancholy. She was not a romantic sentimentalist and Kit was not a philanderer; in fact, he had told her something about Evelyn. They were travelling companions who had met by chance, and at Winnipeg their roads went different ways. Yet but for Kit Alison knew she would have been lonely, and some time before morning she must let him go. To think about it disturbed her.

"Where do you start for when we get to Winnipeg?" she asked.

"I think I'll get off at Harper's Bar. Gordon, the fellow with the frying-pan, talked about a new bridge and thought the engineer might engage me. Since you made friends of Gordon's kiddies perhaps I owe you something. You see, I must get a job as soon as possible."

"I owe you much," said Alison. "Then the children were your friends."

"Well, let's agree they were our friends. I don't know if mutual debts, so to speak, cancel out, but I hope they do not, and I don't want to cancel mine. You undertook the housekeeping and you feasted me."

Alison knew her debt would stand. When her pluck was breaking Kit braced her up. His jokes had banished her dreariness and in his society she had got back hope and calm.

"I wonder whether my train starts from Winni-

peg before yours," she said. "I wouldn't like to be left at the station——"

"Yours goes first, and I'll see you on board, but we won't talk about it yet. Let's pretend we're picnicking in the Old Country; for example, at a tarn I know. Imagine the train and the pines have vanished, and red heath and bright green moss roll down to the water. Little Herdwick sheep dot the slopes, and at the top the moor is broken by a dark gash the storms have cut. A beck sparkles in the stones and at the bottom leaps across a ledge——"

"The tarn ripples," said Alison. "A keen wind blows across the fells, but behind the steep bank, where the mountain ashes grow, the water's smooth and stained by the peat. In the sun it shines like amber; where the clouds' shadows fall it's dark like claret."

"Do you know the mountain ashes grow up the bank?"

"I know Swinset tarn," said Alison. "Whinnyates is four or five miles off across the moor. But take your coffee. And you might give me the fruit can."

Kit took the coffee and began his lunch, but after a time Alison looked up.

"You have stayed for a holiday at Netherdale?"

"That is so. In summer, Netherdale's an attractive spot."

"Were you at the post office? Mrs. Grey takes boarders."

Kit hesitated. He did not want to say he was at Netherhall; for one thing, he believed his relations had done with him. Then Mrs. Carson was an im-

portant lady, and he would sooner Alison did not know Alan was his uncle.

"I stopped farther up the valley. You see, I wanted to get on the moors, and at the dalehead the fishing's good."

Alison gave him a queer look, and he wondered whether she knew Alan Carson preserved the fishing.

"When you were at Whinnyates I suppose you went to Netherdale village?" he said.

"For a time I was teacher at the school. To cross the moor was awkward, and in winter my pony could not face the storms. Then the pay was small and I was ambitious, but sometimes at the office I wanted to be back. Perhaps my habit is to undertake too big a job."

"Ah," said Kit, "when you get to the obstacles that bother you they begin to melt. The proper plan's to set your mouth and shove ahead. Since you left Whinnyates I imagine you have gone some distance, but until you get where you want you mustn't stop."

"You're an optimist," Alison remarked with a smile. "Have you gone far?"

"I've gone *back,*" said Kit rather moodily. "All the same, I am not beaten, and I expect to make a fresh start."

For a few minutes Alison said nothing and Kit was quiet. He thought she sympathized and perhaps she was curious, but he doubted if she wanted him to give her his confidence. Anyhow, he had not boasted; he was not beaten. In the meantime he was sorry for Alison. For a girl to face loneliness and struggle in a new country was hard. All was fresh and to some extent antagonistic. She must obey

rules she did not know and be resigned to much that jarred.

Kit thought Canadians had not much use for beginners, and to find an occupation might be awkward. He wondered whether Alison was daunted, and admitted he did not know. She was quiet and perhaps rather melancholy, but that was all. Anyhow, he could not help. At Winnipeg their roads forked and each must start alone. Kit owned he did not want to think about it.

"I wonder whether I can telegraph when we get to Winnipeg," Alison said by and by. "If Florence knew when I'd arrive, she would meet me. One likes to be met. I'd hate to get off the cars and see nobody I knew. But perhaps the office will be shut."

"I fancy the Canadian telegraph offices do not shut, and after a fixed time you can send a night letter, a long message for a small charge. We'll send your friend a summons that will bring her to the station. After weighing words against pennies in England we can be royally extravagant."

"Is your habit to weigh your words?" Alison inquired.

"In a telegram, yes," said Kit. "I don't know if it's strange, but as a rule the pennies tipped the beam. When my remarks cost something, I'm parsimonious."

Alison gave him a kind smile. "You're modest. At all events, I'm glad you were not parsimonious on the train. Your humor helped——"

"Oh, well, I doubt if my humor's cultivated, but it's, so to speak, my stock-in-trade. You see, I may not get a post, and if I do not, I think I'll push out

for the lonely settlements and play the fiddle. It looks as if the North Americans are a strenuous rather than light-hearted lot, but so long as some days are dreary and folks are sad, perhaps to joke and play the fiddle is a useful job."

Alison turned her head and looked about. The light wind had dropped and the sun was very hot. The calm lake shone dazzlingly and one smelt the pines, and the creosote in the railroad ties. But for the clash of shovels, all was quiet, and groups of listless emigrants occupied the belts of shade. Nobody talked, and the children had stopped their play. In the Canadian woods one knew them forlorn strangers.

"They're tired, Kit," said Alison. "Play them something."

Kit went for his violin, and sitting in the stones, pulled the bow across the strings. His clothes were not conspicuous and his figure melted in the shadow of the trees. The calm water was like a sounding board, and when he began to play, the great composer's march seemed to float across the lake. Alison wondered whether Kit consciously helped the illusion, for the music was distant and somehow fairylike. Perhaps it was monotonous, for Kit was satisfied to mark the rhythm, but she felt it called, and the measured beat carried her along. She pictured people going somewhere, going steadfastly, and she wanted to join their advance.

The emigrants were no longer listless. People turned their heads as if to see who played, and Alison thought a number knew the music, because they smiled. Some got up and came nearer the shady

rock, but although Kit knew he had captured his audience he used control. Their stopping at the lake was but a rest by the way and nobody yet saw the journey's end. One shouldered one's load and went forward; that was all.

When Kit put down his violin a crowd surrounded the rock. Alison heard English voices and calls in languages she did not know.

"They have not had enough," she said. "They want you to begin again."

"I think not," Kit replied. "I played the march on board the ship and we'll try something fresh. All are not foreigners, and you'll sing our lot a love song that's famous where the English language goes."

He put the fiddle to his neck and for a minute or two played, like an overture, two or three old Scottish airs. Then he nodded to Alison and began a prelude on the lower strings.

Alison got up. Her color was high, but she trusted Kit's support. Her voice was steady and carried far.

"Maxwelltoun braes are bonnie——"

Kit knew she was going to triumph; his part was to help by quiet hamonies. As a rule her mood was sober, but he imagined she was moved by something of the tenderness and passion the dark North hides. Then, for the most part the British emigrants were North British, and Canada wears a Scottish stamp. Alison felt her power and she let herself go.

"Like dew on the gowan lying——"

Train hands came from baggage cars and the locomotive cab. They advanced noiselessly, and the crowd was still. In the distance shovels clashed, but

the musical voice dominated all, and Burns' love song floated, undisturbed, across the Canadian lake.

Kit lowered his violin, and Alison gave the crowd a shy smile. She was not a concert singer; all the music she knew she had studied at a village school. When the cheers and shouts began she blushed and turned to Kit.

"Let's go. I don't think I could sing again."

They stole away, and when Kit put his violin in the car they followed the track. A throbbing noise rolled across the woods, and presently a long black plume of smoke streaked the trees. The throb got louder and the advancing smoke leaped from the forest as if shells exploded along its track. Kit knew a locomotive hauled a heavy load up-hill and he frowned. The construction gang would soon arrive, and when the line was mended the emigrant train would start.

"I expect they're bringing a load of ballast and when they have dumped the stuff we'll get off," he remarked in a careless voice.

Alison said nothing. But for Kit, and another whom she had not seen for long, she had not a friend in the new country. Loneliness was hard to bear and to know Kit was about was some comfort. At Winnipeg they must separate.

They sat down in the shade by the broken track. The train had arrived and men swarmed about the line. The cars carried gravel and a massive plow topped the piles of stones. Kit was interested. The track was not like an English track; the rails were light and not altogether even. The cross-ties were loosely ballasted and some were out of line. Yet

they carried loads Old Country engineers had not tried to move.

Then, for a thousand miles, the road pierced a wilderness where the traffic would not pay for locomotive coal. The men who pushed the line across the rocks and woods obviously had pluck. Moreover, when the road reached the plains, but for the Red River settlement, Manitoba was a wilderness. In the West, the plow followed the locomotive and where the rails went homesteads sprang up.

Kit thought the engineers' haste was justified. They started the trains running and afterwards filled up the muskegs and cut out awkward curves. North Americans did not expect their work to stand; their children would use fresh plans. At Montreal merchants pulled down office blocks and built higher. The streets were bordered by scaffold poles, cranes rattled, and cement blew about. All was growing; one saw no static calm. Turmoil and destruction of the obsolete marked the nation's swift advance.

Kit, however, did not want to philosophize, and he studied the construction gang. Old Country methods were obviously out of date; the engineers were not going to throw off the ballast by hand. The cars' sides went down and the big plow forged ahead. A cataract of stones marked its progress along the train, and the shovel gang went forward behind the noisy wave. Hollows vanished and a bank of gravel soon stretched across the gap. Men dragged clanging rails and hammers beat.

"Everybody has got his job; I don't see a fellow who could slack," Kit remarked and laughed. "In

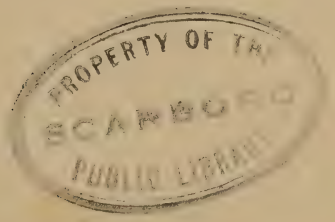
a way, their hustling's ominous. To keep up with a lot like that would bother a stranger!"

After a time the gravel train steamed away, and Kit and Alison went back along the line. Alison cooked supper, and when all was ready Kit picked up the basket.

"We shall not need the stuff that's left and I don't expect the emigrants' children have got very much," he said.

Alison agreed and Kit carried the basket to the Colonist car. She thought him melancholy, and when he came back she smiled. She herself was not cheerful, but at their last supper she must not brood. She served the meal and when Kit began to banter her she joked. The jokes, however, were flat and her appetite was not good. By and by she heard the conductor shout: "All aboard. Next stop's Winnipeg."

The cars jolted and the wheels began to roll. Alison put up the tin plates and got her sewing bag. The train slowly crossed the mended line and plunged into the woods. Rocks and tangled pines rolled by and thick smoke blew about the shaking cars. Kit studied the newspaper; Alison sewed and mused.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CHAPTER XI

THE ROAD FORKS

WINNIPEG station was crowded by dejected emigrants. The broken line had disorganized the traffic and nobody knew when the westbound trains would start, but the fashionable young woman at the information office thought none would go for two or three hours. Kit saw his polite inquiries bored her, but she haughtily indicated the telegraph office, and when he sent off Alison's message they started for the town.

The night was hot, the pavements were wet, and thunder clouds rolled across the moon. For the most part the stores were shut, and Main Street was quiet but for the groups at the doors of the large hotels. Only that people who came out jostled others going in, it looked as if they went to a theatre. The Canadians' habit is to perambulate the hotels in the evening, and the rotunda is the citizen's free club.

At the cheap hotels rows of men occupied the window chairs and rested their boots on the radiator pipes. Some smoked and ruminated; some frankly slept, and on the whole Kit thought them a dreary lot. He followed Main Street to Portage Avenue and noted the new ambitious office buildings. A

Deer Park car was starting, and Alison stopped for a few moments to watch the passengers get on board. They were obviously going home and she envied them.

She touched Kit, and they went along a side street to the river. Lights burned in the small frame houses, and the reflections from the windows touched the trees in the narrow garden-lots. Wooden pillars and sawn scrolls ornamented the shiplap fronts, and although the verandas were enclosed like meat-safes by mosquito mesh, Alison thought the houses picturesque.

Sometimes she heard cheerful voices and sometimes a gramophone. By and by she stopped opposite a window behind which a woman sang. Heavy drops splashed from the trees and the sidewalk was muddy; her boots were wet and a mosquito bit her neck.

"Oh," she said, savagely brushing off the insect, "that's the second! I hope I killed the brute! Perhaps I'm revengeful, but it looks as if the mosquitoes knew we were strangers. Haven't you got bitten?"

"If it would be some comfort, we'll stop until I do get bitten," Kit replied.

"You are rather noble," Alison remarked with a laugh. "You see, I felt the mosquitoes were not just; but I'd really sooner they left you alone, and we won't stop." She indicated the little houses and the cheerful domestic lights. "Don't you feel as if we were shut out?"

"To control your imagination is a useful plan. When the Canadians know you, they won't want to

shut you out. So far, they have not had much chance to cultivate us."

"You are some comfort," said Alison in a quiet voice. "Let's see the river, and then I think we'll go back to the station. I feel the noise is bracing."

They went to the river. The moon was on the water, and the current revolved in muddy eddies along the high bank. Vague trees marked the top, and in the distance pale lightning flickered across the sky. For a minute or two big drops splashed the pools and Alison felt the moisture warm on her skin. Then the rain stopped and a motor boat forged noisily up-stream and vanished in the dark.

"Perhaps the boat is typical," Kit remarked. "Not very long since, the half-breed voyagers poled their canoes up the Assiniboine and settlers crossed the plains in Red River carts. Now I expect a flour-mill clerk goes as far on a holiday afternoon as the voyagers went in a week. Although the romance the others knew is gone, a gasoline launch and a railroad car have some advantages."

"Do you think the Red River settlers were romantic?"

"If the folk in the hotel windows are their descendants, I begin to doubt. All the same, when you see them mend a broken track, you're forced to acknowledge them a hefty lot. Well, suppose we admit the Red River man's main object was to get there? Don't you see his doing so is important?"

"I'd sooner talk about something else," said Alison quietly. "When you arranged about my sleeper I was not altogether satisfied, and to-day I made inquiries. You gave me your ticket."

"So long as you are satisfied we won't dispute," said Kit. "Since I knew your independence I might, of course, have bought another ticket and allowed you to pay; but I did not. I got a berth for nothing on board the Colonist, and since I slept until morning neither of us has much grounds to grumble."

Alison touched his arm. "I didn't want to grumble. I think I wanted you to know I knew. To find people do things like that is encouraging."

"You mustn't exaggerate. To-night we're forlorn strangers, but when you are a big company's secretary and I have built a famous bridge we'll meet for dinner at an expensive hotel and talk about the evening we arrived at Winnipeg."

"Ah," said Alison, "I may not get the chance I want; but if I am lucky, I'll know you helped and I'll meet you where you like. In the meantime, perhaps, we ought to start for the station."

They went back. Nobody yet knew when the trains would go, and Kit put Alison's rug on a bench in the waiting hall and sat down on his bag. The spacious hall was rather like a palace than an English waiting-room. The light was soft and clear. Noble columns supported the huge glass dome and good pictures of Canadian landscapes occupied the walls. The ornamental benches were moulded to one's body and the floor was white marble.

The passengers, however, did not harmonize with the hall. Listless, dusty emigrants leaned against the pillars and crowded the benches. For the most part their clothes were threadbare and their boots were broken. They used bundles for pillows, and some who slept extended arms and legs in uncouth

poses. A number had spread ragged blankets on the marble flags, and dejected groups, surrounded by their baggage, lay about. Kit saw broken boxes, bundles covered by colored quilts, and rolls of dirty bedding. It looked as if the foreigners had brought all their household goods and would not risk the stuff in the baggage cars.

They threw paper matches, fruit bags and banana skins about the floor, and the hall smelt of musty clothes and rank tobacco. Men smoked and brooded, women talked in moody voices, and jaded children cried. Nobody bothered about them, for Colonist passengers cannot buy civility. They did not know when their trains would start, and Kit doubted if all knew where they went. They had bought a ticket for a spot on the map, at which, perhaps, somebody from their native village had prospered.

One got a sense of apathetic resignation, but Kit remarked that some mouths were firm and some brows were knit. After all, the slack and hopeless do not emigrate, and those who took the plunge had virile qualities. Their patience was perhaps remarkable, but Kit thought they could be moved. To put the crowd on the cars, however, was the railroad company's business, and Kit gave Alison a packet of candies he had bought and lighted a cigarette. Alison motioned him to rest his back against the rug she pulled across the bench. By and by a bell tolled and wheels rattled.

"My train?" said Alison, and Kit stopped a railroad official.

"Winnipeg Beach excursion," said the man, and

Kit thought Alison was glad because she need not go.

When the excursionists crossed the hall he studied the groups. The girls' clothes were fashionable; the young men wore straw hats and summer flannels. They carried themselves well, their steps were quick, and their voices happy. Kit thought them keen and optimistic, and he speculated about their occupations. For one thing, it looked as if their pay was good. Alison frowned, for she marked a contrast. The excursionists were going home after a holiday. In the morning they would resume their well-rewarded labors at office and store, but she had no home, and it might be long before she got a post.

A girl gave her a sympathetic glance and touched her companion. He was a rather handsome young fellow and he stopped in front of Kit. Kit, sitting on his bag, leaned against Alison's bench, and her dress touched his clothes.

"You're from the Old Country? Waiting for the west-bound?" the Canadian inquired in a friendly voice.

"That is so," said Kit. "Do you know anything about the trains? So far as we can find out, the railroad men do not."

The other laughed. "In the West you don't bother the railroad gang. They don't like it. You buy your ticket and wait until they think you ought to start. However, the yard loco's moving some cars, and I expect the Vancouver express will soon pull out. Well, I reckon you're going the proper way. On the plains we'll cut a record crop and trade will

boom. If you're willing to hustle, you'll make good. Will you take a cigarette?"

He gave Kit a package, and the girl gave Alison a bag of fruit. When they went off Alison's eyes twinkled, but Kit thought her color rather high.

"They're good sorts," he remarked. "Husband and wife?"

"Not yet," said Alison, as if she knew. "They are going to be married; I think they fixed it, not long since, at Winnipeg Beach. The girl's kind, and because she's happy she wanted to sympathize."

She turned her head and Kit saw a light. Perhaps the others thinking them man and wife was not remarkable, and he began to muse. Although the Winnipeg girls were attractive, none had a charm like Alison's. Their walk and carriage indicated that they knew their power to attract, but Alison's charm was unconscious. Kit liked her level glance, her touch of quiet humor and her independence. When she was gone he would be lonely. Since he was not a romantic sentimentalist, there was the puzzle.

Alison knew he was Evelyn's lover, and although now he thought about it, she had some physical charm, her beauty did not move him. In fact, he was not attracted because she was a girl; sex had nothing to do with it. Perhaps her trusting him accounted for much. One liked to be trusted and one liked people one helped; but Kit doubted if it accounted for all. Anyhow, he did not want to let her go. Alison was quiet, and he lighted a cigarette from the Canadian's package.

At length, a bell rang and a long train rolled into the station. Alison got up, as if she braced herself,

and Kit seized her bag. He told her to hold his arm and they were carried to the door by a jostling crowd. On the platform the crowd stopped and surged tumultuously about. Tall iron rails enclosed the space and a group of muscular railroad men kept the gate. Kit supposed they wanted to examine the tickets, since another train started soon.

The emigrants, however, had waited long, and now they saw the train they meant to get on board. A number knew no English. On board ship and at the stations strangers drove them about and penned them up like cattle. It looked as if they had had enough and their dull resignation vanished. They growled sullenly, and Kit thought "growl" was the proper word, for the noise carried a hint of animal savageness. When the shipyard gates stopped a strikers' march, Kit had heard the ominous note before.

"Give me your ticket," he said to Alison. "I'll see you on the cars."

"But the railway people will turn you back."

"I think not; if they try, they're fools," said Kit. "This crowd's going through."

For a few minutes the railroad men struggled to hold the jostling passengers, and then one shut the ponderous gate. The mob howled and rolled ahead, and the group was flung against the rails. A whistle pierced the turmoil; porters and train-hands ran to help, but the emigrants' blood was fired and they raged behind the barrier. A few, perhaps, were fanatic anarchists; others had borne oppression and stern military rule. Now authority again blocked their road they meant to fight.

The rails were high, but men getting on others' backs began to climb across. Then somebody reopened the gate and a fresh guard tried to hold the gap. Kit liked the fellows' pluck, but he thought them foolish. Anyhow, they were not going to stop him. Alison must get her train.

Clutching the bag, he steered her into the press. He stumbled against luggage the emigrants dropped and doubted if Alison kept her feet, but she stuck to him and they got nearer the gate. In front he saw heaving shoulders and bent backs. The men's arms were jambed; it was like a Rugby scrimmage. Women screamed, and one, jerking up her hand, struck Kit's face. He did not know if he jostled her, but in the turmoil he must go where the others went. People strained and gasped and fought. Jambed tight, they pushed for the barrier; and then the thick rails crashed.

The crowd spilled out across the platform as a flood leaps a broken dam, and Kit, plunging forward, had room to choose his line. The emigrants meant to get on board as soon as possible and they swarmed about the cars nearest the broken rails. Kit saw a better plan.

"Come on!" he shouted, and started for the front of the long train.

After a minute or two he stopped at a second-class car. Behind him others ran along the line and he pushed Alison up the steps. A colored porter came from the vestibule.

"Have you got a sleeper berth?" Kit asked.

"The conductor'll fix you all right," said the porter. "Where's your grip?"

Kit gave him the bag, and when the fellow went off turned and looked about. The group he had remarked steered for the vestibule.

"We mustn't block the steps, and you ought to get your place," he said.

Alison on the top step hesitated, and then put her hand on his shoulder.

"Good-bye! Thank you for all, Kit," she said and turned her head.

Kit kissed her and jumped back. The crowd had reached the car and people pushed him from the steps. For a moment Alison leaned over the rail and he waved his cap.

"Cheerio! Look in front!" he shouted, and Alison smiled and vanished.

Two or three minutes afterwards the cars jolted and smoke and cinders blew about. Lights rolled by and melted, the locomotive bell stopped and the train was gone. Kit went back to the waiting hall, but he did not steer for the bench Alison had occupied. Sitting down across the floor, he moodily lighted his pipe.

CHAPTER XII

KIT PLAYS FOR HIS SUPPER

IN the morning Kit's train stopped at a prairie station and he went along the line to the baggage car. The door rolled back, and when he jumped on the step a sack plunged out and rolled down the bank. Then a box crashed on the ballast, and since Kit did not want to be knocked off he moved along the step. Inside the car a muscular fellow pulled down a pile of baggage and another waited to throw out the stuff. Although Kit beckoned, the men did not stop.

"Have you got a small brown steamer trunk?" he inquired.

"We have not," said one. "Get out of the light!"

"The trunk was loaded up at Montreal——"

The baggage man gave an order to his mate, and they dragged a box to the door and pushed it from the ledge. In order to avoid a collision Kit jumped down and when he climbed back his face was red.

"Where is my trunk?"

"Search me! You're a sticker all right," the railroad man remarked and threw a bag as if he aimed at Kit.

Kit thought the next bag might hit him, and he got down. A man from the office pushed past and,

refusing to stop, climbed on board the car. When the train started he gave Kit a careless glance.

"Are you wanting something?"

"I want my trunk. At Montreal your baggage clerk said I'd get it when I arrived."

"Sure!" remarked the agent. "Those fellows do talk like that; it's in the company's folders. Have you got a check."

Kit pulled out a check he got at Montreal.

"Well," said the agent, "your trunk's not on the train. She may come along in the morning and she may be a week. Depends on your luck."

He went off and shut his office. Nobody came for the baggage and Kit sat down on the broken box. The cars had begun to melt into the plain and the smoke that rolled across the grass got faint. Fifty yards off a small frame hotel faced the track. The next building was a grocery, and then six or seven little shiplap houses bordered the wagon trail. There was no pavement, and the black soil was torn by wheels, but a few planks went along the front of the houses. By the hotel, two light wagons and a battered car were in the grass, and on the veranda a man smoked his pipe. Harper's Bar was obviously a tranquil spot.

Although the settlement had not much charm, the background pleased Kit. The prairie was not the monotonous flat he had pictured. The plain rolled, and the grass was dotted by tall red flowers like lilies. Ponds shone in the hollows, poplar bluffs checkered the rises, and at one spot yellow sandhills reflected the sun. A belt of trees, marking a river, curved about a shallow valley, and in the distance the

green and ocher of the grass melted into ethereal blue.

The landscape was not like an English landscape, for the colors were vivid and the outlines sharp. Although the sun was hot, a keen wind rolled white clouds across the sky, and Kit got a sense of spaciousness and freedom. For one thing, he saw no fences. Only a skeleton windmill and a wooden homestead, a mile or two off, indicated that the prairie was not a wilderness.

Kit pulled out his wallet. In England he had reckoned by shillings, and now he had begun to reckon by dollars; his wad of paper money was ominously thin. All the same, his last meal was the supper Alison cooked on board the cars, and he glanced at the hotel. On the whole he thought he would try the grocery and he crossed the track.

Although the skeleton door was covered by a mosquito net, flies swarmed about the grocery. Dead flies stuck to the paper traps and dotted the dusty floor. The room was very hot and Kit sat down on a barrel. After he had knocked for some time, a man came in. The storekeeper had no coat and his white shirt was crumpled and soiled.

"I was hoeing up my potato hills," he said. "The boys expect me to sit around and be sociable evenings."

"Can you sell me something to eat?" Kit inquired.

"Crackers?" suggested the other. "Maybe some cheese? I might give you butter, but you'd want to use a can."

Kit bought cheese and crackers; and then asked: "How far is the new bridge?"

"Eight miles. Sometimes a supply train stops at the station tank, but if you want to ride, your plan's to hire Cassidy's flivver. I reckon he'd take you out for three or four dollars."

"It looks as if I'd have to walk," said Kit. "Which way do you go?"

The storekeeper told him and resumed: "You talk like you was from the Old Country. Are you looking for a job?"

Kit said it was so and the other smiled.

"I was raised in England; the orphanage shipped me out and a whiles since they put a picture of my store in their little book. Two fellows loading a wagon at the steps and a big freight train on the track in front! Thomas Lightfoot, merchant. Another —— boy does well in Canada, printed at the top. I don't grumble, but if the boys would pay their bills, I might do better. Well, the sun is pretty fierce and maybe you'll take a drink."

He went off and came back carrying two glasses of pale green liquor in which ice floated.

"Good luck!" he said. "I'm a lawful citizen; the stuff's soft all right."

"Thank you! You're a first-class sort," said Kit, and drained his glass, for the lemonade was cold and good.

"If the bridge bosses turn you down, you might go on to Jardine, where the boys are putting up a tank," Lightfoot resumed, and looking about his shelves, gave Kit a small can of fruit. "Another on me! I reckon it will help your lunch."

Kit thanked him and started for the bridge. The storekeeper's kindness was encouraging, because he

had begun to feel that Canada was a foreign country. He did not know if the Canadians were antagonistic, but they were not polite. Kit thought the baggage man's ordering him to get out was typical, but in a sense perhaps it was logical. The fellow did not have his trunk and there was no use in talking. Kit smiled and looked in front.

The trail went up a gentle slope, and where the wheels had torn the sod the black soil reflected the light as if the stuff was greasy. The wheel-marks were not straight; they curved about clumps of brush and sloos where the grass was high. Near the top, a farmer turned the clods in the summer fallow and dust rolled like smoke about indistinct horses and sparkling steel.

By and by the soil got lighter and the grass was rather gray than green. The black stuff was the *gumbo* in which the wheat plant thrives, but it looked as if the fertile belt followed the river, and on the high ground the wheels plowed up sandy gravel. Although Kit had thought to see homesteads, and fields of wheat rolling in the wind, Manitoba was yet marked by spaces cultivation had not touched.

After a time he sat down in the grass by a sparkling pond. Behind the pond was a poplar bluff, and cool shadows trembled on the grass. Kit, pulling out the cheese and crackers, began his lunch. His violin was all he carried, he did not know when he would get his trunk, and his money was nearly gone. Then it was possible the bridge engineers would have no use for him. Perhaps he had some grounds to be anxious, but he was not.

The wind and the sunshine banished moody

thought. The sky was blue and to look across the spacious plain was bracing. One saw it melt in the distance, and the distance called. If he did not get a job, he must fiddle for his supper, and in the morning he would push on again. Sometimes in England he had pictured humorously a minstrel's life, and now it looked as if the life might be his.

A gopher stole from the grass and plunged into a hole. A flock of birds flew along the edge of the bluff. They were like English blackbirds, but their wings were marked by golden bars. Splendid red lilies dotted the plain, the tossing branches made a soothing noise and the wind blew away the flies.

Kit opened the fruit can. He had meant to be frugal, but he was hungry, and the acid currants helped the cheese and crackers. When he had satisfied his appetite all was gone and he lighted his pipe. He was not bothered by luggage and when one travelled light one went farthest. To start with a fiddle and two or three small bills was something of an adventure. Lying in the grass he smoked and mused.

He pictured Evelyn under the big oaks at Netherhall. Her white dress cut the shadows and her voice harmonized with the river's languid splash. She was serene and graceful, and she carried herself proudly. One felt the sweep of smooth grass, the flower borders, and the dignified old house were proper. To see her at the tarn was harder, and the picture got indistinct. On the bleak moor Evelyn was somehow exotic, and Kit admitted he could not see her on board the emigrant ship. When he thought about it, he smiled. To picture Evelyn's singing in the third-class saloon was ridiculous.

Kit let it go and pondered tranquilly. On the whole, he thought temperament rather than circumstances accounted for one's adventures. In a sense he was not forced to start for Canada; were he another he might have taken another line. He was resting by the Manitoba bluff because he was Christopher Carson and had inherited qualities that persuaded him to go; he did not see Evelyn in the third-class saloon because she was Evelyn. Anyhow, it was something like that, but he was not a philosopher, and he began to muse about Alison.

Although he knew her fastidious, when she cooked supper on the train and occupied the bench at Winnipeg station, her surroundings did not jar. One felt shabbiness and dreariness vanished when she was about. It looked as if she had power to transmute the ugly things she touched to something fine. Kit wondered whether he was romantic, but he did not think he exaggerated much.

Yet Alison, so to speak, was not at all remarkable, and when one speculated where her charm was one did not know. All the same, she had charm; perhaps it was her frank, thoughtful look, her obvious sincerity. Kit saw her, tired and forlorn but smiling, on the bench at the marble waiting-hall; and the emigrants lying drearily about the flags. Then the train rolled into the station and the passion of the crowd was roused. Alison clung to him and they fought to reach the gate. The rails went down, they sped across the platform and he pushed her up the steps.

Perhaps it was strange, but Kit did not remember all he said. Something about bracing up and look-

ing in front. Well, he was a fool, for now he thought about it, Alison had braced him. Anyhow, he kissed her and the cars began to roll ahead. He wanted to jump on board, but the train went faster and the lights got faint. . . . The dim reflections melted . . . and Kit was asleep.

When he looked up, the shadows had moved across the grass and he pulled out his watch. If he wanted to reach the bridge for supper, he must start, and picking up his violin case, he set off. The trail dipped to hollows where the grass was tall, and curved round shady bluffs. Gophers ran about, and a flock of prairie chickens sprang noisily from the brush. Sometimes Kit saw a homestead and a belt of dark green wheat; sometimes he labored across sandhills where stable litter bound the road. In front the wheel-marks went across the horizon.

At length a belt of trees began to get distinct and Kit saw smoke. The smoke trailed far across the grass, and when he got nearer, was pierced by a shining plume of steam. Hammers beat like chiming bells, and he heard the musical clash of steel. Kit unconsciously went faster. Where men hammered iron was the place for him.

After a time he reached a gap in the trees. The railroad pierced the wood, and on one side the birches and poplars were chopped back. The trunks lay beside a forking row of rails and Kit smelt sappy wood and withering leaves. Following the branch track, he stopped at a river. Log shacks, tents, and two or three iron shanties occupied the high clay bank, and a wooden bridge carried the line across. A hundred yards off, clusters of iron columns,

strongly braced, broke the muddy current. Steel girders and a network of tie-rods and wooden platforms joined the columns to the bank.

Work had stopped and brown-skinned men swarmed about the tin basins on the benches in front of the bunk-house. The men's shirts and brown overalls were stained by grease and clay. Kit thought them an athletic lot, and he stopped one.

"Is your boss about?" he inquired.

"He's not," said the other and started for the washing bench.

Kit got in front of the fellow. "When will the boss arrive? I'm looking for a job."

"I sure don't know. You might see the foreman. He's by the shack."

Kit steered for the spot, and the foreman looked at him thoughtfully.

"Are you a blacksmith?"

"I am not, but I can use a forge hammer and sharpen tools."

"We want a blacksmith," remarked the foreman, and began to move away.

"Can't you give me a job of some sort?"

"Nothing doing; we're full up. You might try the tank at Jardine. It's ten miles west," said the foreman and went off.

Kit frowned. In twenty-four hours all he had eaten was a small can of fruit and some crackers and cheese. He was young and his appetite was good; he did not see himself walking to Jardine and waiting for breakfast. Besides, he might not get breakfast. Then he began to smile. After all,

he might earn his supper by fiddling, and he tuned his violin.

In two or three minutes a crowd of muscular workmen surrounded the spot. Kit played Mendelssohn's "Wings of Song," but he felt calm and stately music did not go, and since he did not know much ragtime, he experimented with Scottish airs. A ranting, clanging reel captured his audience, and Kit knew he was on the proper track, for he saw long boots beat the ground and brown hands mark the time. He tried a Strathspey, but Strathspeys are awkward music, unless one is a Scot, and he began a Highland chieftain's march. Then a man came from the bunk-house and looked about.

"Wha's playing?" he inquired.

The others indicated Kit, and the man signed him to advance.

"Yon reel was not bad; ye got the lilt and swing o't," he remarked. "Ye cannot play a Strathspey; I dinna ken about the march. In a dance tune a fiddle's heartsome, but for real music ye need the pipes."

"A fiddle has some limitations," Kit agreed in a sober voice. "Its line is melody. Where you want volume, perhaps an organ——"

"An organ canna' beat the pipes," the other rejoined, and the workmen began to laugh.

"We like you, Jock, but we want our supper," said one. "Quit talking and set up the hash."

The cook did not turn his head; he studied Kit.

"Ye'll not have got supper yet?"

Kit said he had not, and the cook pointed to the bunk-house door.

"Ye ken something about music. Come away in."

"Speed up! We want supper," shouted the workmen, and the cook and Kit started for the shack in front of a noisy mob.

CHAPTER XIII

THE COOK'S MUSICIAN

KIT did not know where he would get breakfast, and he indulged his appetite. The food was good and all that bothered him was he could not copy the workmen's speed. Bacon, fried potatoes, beans and slabs of pie vanished; the men drained cans of tea and shouted for fresh supplies. They were muscular fellows. Although they were Western, Kit thought their type simpler, and, in a way, more primitive than the mechanics he had known. The shipyard workers were sportsmen, politicians, and sometimes philosophers. At the engine shops one heard much about racing, football and social economics. It looked as if the Canadians concentrated on their occupation, and now they frankly concentrated on their supper. In fact, Kit felt the rude feast was marked by something of a Homeric touch.

The men's clothes were thin, and one saw their bodies were molded on classical lines; sometimes an unconscious pose was statuesque. Then one got a hint of careless, optimistic confidence. The bridge gang obviously did not bother; they labored, fought, and trusted their luck. Kit felt the gang and the

bunk-house harmonized. The piles of food, rusty stove, and battered tin lamps were properly in the picture. All was rude and vigorous, and had nothing to do with modern cultivation.

Before Kit was altogether satisfied the men were gone, and the cook began to carry off the plates. Kit helped and afterwards they lighted their pipes.

"If ye'll get your fiddle, I'll let ye see how yon march should go," the cook said by and by.

Kit played a few bars; and then the other, drumming on the table, marked the puzzling rhythm.

"I think I see," said Kit. "It's a linked note trick; you drive the last quaver across the bar. Let's try——"

"Noo ye have got it," the cook approved. "If ye could stop for a week, I'd show ye how a Strathspey is played. Highland music is no' like ither music."

"Five beats to a bar are awkward," Kit agreed. "Anyhow, I can't stop for a week. In fact, since your foreman has no use for me I ought to shove off."

"Ye'll get breakfast before ye tak' the road. Do ye waken early?"

Kit said when he was at the shipyard he was forced to get up soon, and the cook nodded.

"Then, if ye'll light the stove in the morning and play yon march, ye might bide until the boss comes back. We do not expect him for two, three days. I reckon ye'd help me chop wood and cut potatoes?"

Kit was willing. He liked the cook and it was not important that the hospitality the fellow offered was the company's.

"Thank you," he said. "But why do you want me to play the march?"

The other told him. Long since, when he was a herd boy, a Highland gentleman occupied a shooting lodge near the Scottish village, and in the morning his piper played on the terrace. Kit had not thought the Scots romantically sentimental, and he remarked the cook's apologetic smile. The fellow admitted that he himself played the pipes.

"To hear the music in the fresh morning was fine," he said. "I was away early with the dogs when a' was quiet and only the sheep were moving on the moor. Maybe ye'd hear a cock-grouse crow, and then the pipes began. Weel, I was a raw herd laddie and I thought, if I got rich, my piper would waken me with music like yon. Ye see, the march is famous; I'm thinking the Prince's pipers played it on the road to Derby. . . ."

He knocked out his pipe, smiled, and resumed:

"It's lang syne and I'm no yet rich. To the moor where the sheep fed is a far cry, but when ye began yon march I saw the mist roll up the brae and I thought the grouse were calling. Weel, until the boss comes back I've got my piper, and I'll lie until ye play for me the morn. In the meantime I must make the coffee and slice the breakfast pork."

He went to his store, and Kit went to a bench in front of the shack. In the distance the prairie was blue; the sky was saffron and red. By the river bank dark trees cut the sunset, and fading reflections touched the stream. The camp was quiet but hammers rang along the bridge, and after a time a pillar of fire leaped up. For a few moments the flame was

smoky, and then the light got clear and Kit knew somebody adjusted the blast-lamp's valves.

Braced columns and steel lattice shone like silver, and on the high platforms workmen's figures, in black silhouette, cut the strong illumination. Grass and leaves sparkled as if touched by frost, and a glittering flood broke against the piers. The sunset's reflections vanished, and where the bright beam did not reach all was dark.

The hammers beat faster and small pale flames marked the rivet forges. Kit saw red specks move along the bridge and sparks fly, and he ruminated humorously. His fiddle had earned his supper, and for two or three days he could reckon on his food and a bunk-house bed; but he was not ambitious to be a cook's musician. His job was at the bridge. Well, there was no use in brooding, and his first post in Canada was rather a joke. By and by he returned to the bunk-house and was soon asleep.

Not long after daybreak he got down from his bunk and stole across the floor. The bridge gang slept noisily, and to waken the men before the usual time might be rash. To light the stove was perhaps not a minstrel's job, but he had undertaken to do so, and since it was his first experiment, he had got up early.

The stove was in a lean-to shed and did not bother Kit. The poplar billets snapped behind the bars and the iron got red. He liked the smell of the wood, the morning was fresh, and the warmth was soothing. Pulling out his watch, he saw he did not waken the cook for some time, and he made coffee and found a slab of pie. When he had drained the can and the

pie was gone, he lighted his pipe. After all, to help the cook had some advantages.

At length, he got up and tuned his fiddle by the track. Mist floated about the river and dew sparkled on the grass. All was fresh and bracing, and Kit's mood was buoyant. He put the fiddle to his shoulder and a joyous reveille roused the sleeping gangs. Then for a few moments Kit stopped. Sometimes at camps he had known reveille was not joyous, and he pictured tight-mouthed men strapping up packs and ground-sheets and taking the muddy road. The road faced the rising sun, but it had carried Kit's pals West.

Well, it was done with and one must look ahead. Kit was the cook's piper, and he pulled the bow across the lower strings. He thought the pipes began on under tones; and then he leaped an octave to the ranting tune. The music was not great music, but it fired the blood and moved one's feet. Kit was not playing for critics; he called muscular men to work. Perhaps the chords were like the pipes, but no pipes could give the clear ringing notes one got from the high strings. If the cook had imagination, he would hear the broadswords rattle and the clansmen's feet. The Highlanders marched for Derby to a tune like that.

The music carried far and men came from the house and tents, splashed at the wash bench, and waved to Kit.

"Some tune, stranger! Hit her up!"

By and by the foreman walked along the line.

"I reckoned you had quit!"

Kit said the cook had stated he might stay for a day or two, and the other nodded.

"Well, you can play mornings and evenings. If I hear the fiddle after the boys get busy, I'll put you off the camp."

It looked as if the cook were important, but somebody beat a suspended iron bar and the men started for the house. Kit went with the others and the cook pushed a big coffee can into his hands.

"Hustle round the table and keep the boys supplied. When all's gone ye'll get a fresh lot in the shack."

Kit saw he must earn his breakfast. In Canada, a minstrel was evidently not an honored guest, but he must not grumble, and he ran about with the can. When the men went off, the cook gave him a heaped plate and he noticed that the bacon was thin and crisp and the sliced potatoes were golden brown. Kit imagined the gang did not get the best.

After breakfast they cleaned the plates, and then Kit chopped wood and carried water. In the afternoon he pulled down and mended the smoking stove pipe, and when dusk fell he admitted that to help the cook was not the joke he thought.

A day or two afterwards he carried a tub of potatoes to a shady spot under the trees, and sitting down in the chopped branches, sharpened his knife on his boot. The bridge gang was not fastidious, and the knife was dull. His clothes were greasy and his skin was not clean, for he had recently scraped the stove flues, and the soap was not very good. Then he had burned his hand and to play the fiddle hurt, but in the morning he must play the

Highland chieftain's march. The march began to get monotonous, and on the whole Kit thought when the construction boss returned and sent him off he would be resigned to go.

By and by he heard steps and looked up. Gordon, whose children he had amused on board the cars, stopped in front of the potato tub. He threw down the pack he carried, and when he studied Kit his eyes twinkled.

"You made it! A fellow at the settlement reckoned I'd find you at the bridge."

"I arrived two or three days ago, but I'm not staying long."

"Don't you like your job?"

"The trouble is, I haven't got a job. Anyhow, I'm not on the pay-roll. My business is to play the fiddle mornings and evenings. Between times I carry coal, cut potatoes, and clean the stove, so to speak, for relaxation."

"Something fresh?" said Gordon. "In the Old Country you didn't carry coal."

"At an English shipyard the trucks discharge into the furnace hoppers. All the same, at the beginning I used a forge hammer."

"Now you talk!" said Gordon. "If you were at a shipyard I guess I can fix you. We'll go along and see the smith."

"I saw the foreman and admitted I was not a smith. He stated he had no use for a roustabout."

"A foreman knows where he mustn't make trouble."

"I fancied that was so, because your cook allowed me to stay. I expect a good cook is important."

"A good smith's important, and Bill's my pal. Come on. We'll see what he can do."

They went along the track and Kit inquired for the children.

"They're pretty spry," said Gordon. "When I dumped them at Portage they allowed if I met up with you I was to send you back. They're surely keen on conjuring."

Kit laughed and remarked that he thought Portage was on another line. Gordon nodded.

"That's so. I went back to Winnipeg. Mr. Austin's at the *Strathcona,* and since I was some time in Ontario, I wanted to see if he'd kept my job."

"But has a gentleman at Winnipeg something to do with the bridge?"

"Mr. Austin's the company's engineer; he took a holiday. Wheeler's head construction boss, but he's not around all the time. If we can fix you up, you'll like Austin. He's a pretty good sort of boss."

Kit was not interested, and by and by Gordon stopped at the forge. The smith threw a glowing iron in a tank and looked up. He was a big fellow and his lined face was wet by sweat. He knitted his brows as if he frowned unconsciously.

"Howd'y, Jake. You're back. Are you wanting something?"

"You want help, Bill, my partner, Carson, is your man. He was raised at an Old Country shipyard, but he can clean a cook stove, conjure with a shoestring, and play the fiddle."

"Can he sharpen tools?" Bill inquired.

"Let me try," said Kit, and the smith pulled some chisels from a box. Then he turned to Gordon.

"I don't want you, Jake. Get going!"

Gordon gave Kit a smile, and when he went off Kit looked about. A revolving shaft crossed the roof, and when he put a belt on a pulley, a small thick wheel began to spin. At the shipyard, Kit was for a time at the lathe-shop, and he thought he knew something about grinding tools. Moreover, he saw he must not bother the smith. He claimed he could sharpen tools and the fellow had given him the chisels. When Kit carried back the chisels he would know. The Canadians were a sternly logical lot.

To hold the steel on the spinning stone absorbed Kit. He liked to mold the bevel and see the thick edge melt to an almost invisible line. The roll of the shaft and the noise the slapping belt made were soothing. Perhaps he had some talent for music, but he was, by inheritance, an engineer. After a time, Bill picked up a chisel and felt the edge.

"Pretty good! You can go ahead."

Kit turned and pulled off the belt.

"I'm sorry, but I can't stay."

"Then why in thunder did you begin?"

"Gordon thought you wanted help, but the boys will soon be ready for supper, and I left a tub of potatoes by the track. Jock expects me to cut the potatoes, and I think he's asleep."

"Some folks get their dollars easy," the smith remarked. "Well, I reckon I could put you on the payroll, but I want you now."

"It's awkward," said Kit. "I'd sooner grind the tools, but when I arrived Jock gave me supper, and until he lets me go I'm his man."

"You get your grub; but you don't know if I can hire you up?"

"I don't think it's altogther my argument," Kit replied. "If you like, I'll come back in the morning."

"You make me tired," said the smith. "You better cut your blamed potatoes. Get out!"

Kit went and rather moodily helped the cook serve supper. In Canada a smith's pay is good, but a minstrel's reward was small. Moreover, at the smithy the glimmering forge, the red iron, and the rows of tools had called. There was Kit's occupation; he did not know much about cooking, and all he did know he did not like. When the plates were cleaned he went to the bridge-head and lighted his pipe. After breakfast he resolved to start for the water tank. By and by Gordon arrived, and when he noted Kit's rueful look he smiled.

"Bill wants you in the morning. The foreman agrees he can try you out."

"Then I expect you're accountable," said Kit. "Bill declared I made him tired and ordered me to be off."

"Bill is like that, but I reckon you don't get us," Gordon remarked with a grin. "You want to remember you have done with the Old Country."

"It's rather obvious," said Kit. "All the same, I begin to think a good Canadian's a first-class type. I won't bother you by examples, but I met a young fellow at Winnipeg station I'd like to meet another time. However, Jock expects some music, and I'm in the mood to play a rousing tune."

CHAPTER XIV

THE WATER CURE

IN the morning Kit went to the forge. When he arrived the smith was pulling about some iron, but by and by he gave Kit a nod.

"You cut them potatoes?"

"I expect you ate some for supper."

"Maybe so," agreed the smith. "I don't claim I'm sick!"

Kit studied the fellow. Nothing indicated that he was humorous. His glance was hard and he pushed forward his heavy jaw. Kit, however, did not think him antagonistic. For the most part the bridge gang were a sober lot.

"Shall I start the blower for you?" he inquired.

"You can start your wheel and grind them tools," replied Bill.

Kit got to work and the revolving grindstone bit the steel. Bill set the blower going and its rhythmic throb shook the iron walls. Blue flames danced about the forge, and the iron bedded in the coal began to shine. Bill, leaning down, turned the glowing lump and the reflections touched his face. The lines were deep and Kit remarked the white hair on his knitted brows. His large mouth was firm and his look was

grim. In the background smoke and dust floated about.

Bill pulled the iron from the fire and the gloom was banished. The heavy hammer crashed and dazzling sparks leaped up. To steady the lump and use the hammer was awkward, but Kit stayed at the grindstone. Bill was not the man to whom one rashly offered help.

After a time he gave Kit a bar, marked by a punch where holes must be made, and Kit clamped the iron on the machine-drill table. The wrench he used was worn and slipped on the nuts, and Bill gave him a sliding-jaw spanner.

"When you're through, put her in the box," he said.

Kit saw the spanner was a well-made, accurate tool. At the back of the jaw he noted two small holes, and he smiled.

"To know your tools is useful," he remarked.

"Sure," said Bill. "Anyhow, the spanner's a daisy, and I don't want her left about. When the slobs at the bridge drop their truck overboard they come for mine."

Kit drilled the holes and thought Bill was satisfied. In the afternoon the forge was hot, but all he did interested him and he had sweated by shipyard fires. For two or three days nothing disturbed him; and then a man from the bridge arrived one morning and threw down some tools.

"You'll grind them before you stop," he said, and put a bar on the anvil. "Eye's broke. We want her welded up. I'll wait."

"That's so," said Bill dryly and resumed his hammering.

The workman sat down and began to cut tobacco.

"You don't want to hustle for me; I'll take a smoke. Mr. Austin's waiting for the bar."

"Now you talk!" Bill remarked. "Mr. Austin's the company's engineer, but not long since you were slinging rails. I don't want you near my tool rack. Skat!"

The other pushed the keg he occupied farther from the wall, and by and by Bill beckoned Kit. Kit went to the anvil, and for a minute or two steadied the glowing iron Bill pulled from the forge. The hammer crashed on the hot metal, and Kit turned his head from the flying sparks. When the eye was welded Bill plunged the iron in the tank and threw it on the floor.

"There's your bolt. Light out!"

The workman went off, and some time afterwards Kit moved some drills on a bench.

"I don't see the spanner."

Bill frowned. "If she's gone, I know where she went. Railton was pretty smart."

"You think he picked up the tool when we welded the bolt? If that is so, I'm accountable, and I'll go after the fellow. Suppose you give me a message for somebody at the bridge?"

"If you went now, Railton would guess we were on his track. You want to wait until he gets careless. Maybe I'll think of something in the afternoon."

Kit agreed, and at four o'clock he started for the bridge. The foreman said that the thickness of the stuff the smith inquired about was standard thick-

ness, and he reckoned Bill ought to know. Kit went back along the platform and, stopping at the end, looked about.

The afternoon was very hot and the river shone dazzlingly. An angry turmoil broke against the iron piers, and for some distance down-stream the current was marked by lines of foam. In the shadow of the trees on the high bank dark eddies revolved. Across the river, grass and poplar bluffs rolled back to the horizon.

The landscape, however, did not much interest Kit and he studied the workmen. Some were occupied on stages hung between the piers; some crawled about the lattice girders like spiders on a web; their figures were dark against the thin gray steel and shining water. The wind had dropped, and along the bank smoke and steam went straight up. In England Kit had not known the sun as hot.

The men moved languidly, and where a big tie was hoisted two or three disputed. Kit thought it was the sort of afternoon on which a good foreman leaves the gang alone. For him to claim the forge spanner might make trouble; but he must get the tool.

By and by he noted three or four men on a stage who lifted a heavy brace. They obviously meant to fasten the brace across the lattice for the riveters. Kit thought one was Railton, and he climbed to the stage. The men faced the lattice and did not notice his advance. The stage was four or five feet broad and the other side was open to the river, twenty feet below. Tools were scattered about the planks, but Kit did not see the spanner, and he stopped behind

Railton. The fellow's hip-pocket bulged and Kit believed the spanner accounted for the bulge.

"Can't you hold up your end?" one of the gang inquired.

"I've most got her fixed," said Railton. "Ease her to me and the bolt will go through."

Kit knew Railton would in a few moments feel for the spanner, and something must be risked. Moving noiselessly, he pushed his hand into the bulging pocket. Railton's hand went round his back, but he dared not let go the brace, and Kit pulled out the spanner. He stepped back, and striking his foot against a tool-box, rolled across the planks. When he jumped up Railton blocked the way to the ladder. Railton's face was red and he clenched his fist.

"Did you reckon I carried my wad in my overalls?"

"I reckoned you carried Bill's spanner," Kit rejoined.

"Maybe it was Bill's, but all you can get out of the smithy is yours for keeps. Hand over!"

Kit began to think he must fight for the tool, but he did not mean to do so unless he was forced. Railton was big and had, no doubt, for long been engaged in strenuous labor. Kit was rather lightly built, and at the drawing office one got soft.

"If your argument's good, the spanner's mine. You see, I got the thing out of your pocket."

"One on you, Steve!" a man remarked. "Can you beat it?"

"Oh, shucks! I've no use for talking," said Steve.

"If you can keep the spanner for five minutes, Kid, I'll allow it's yours."

Kit doubted. The platform was narrow and encumbered by the tool-box and a forge. He must fight on awkward ground, and he did not think his antagonist would use the rules of the boxing ring. He expected to be beaten, but if he refused the challenge he must leave the camp.

"I'll try," he said.

Railton jumped across the platform, as if he trusted his weight and strength. Kit's guard was beaten down and his jarred right arm dropped. He felt as if he were struck by a forge hammer, and he fell against the lattice. Another knock like that would put him out, and if he fell the other way he would go into the river. The foreman was some distance off and, if he resolved to stop the fight, a minute or two must go before he reached the spot.

Kit edged away from the lattice and tried to maneuver. He hit Railton, and then the forge blocked his way and he took another knock. He knew his face was cut; he was dizzy and his breath was going. The group on the platform melted and his antagonist was indistinct. If he did not get back to the lattice he must go over the planks, and if he did get back Railton would batter him against the bars. All the same, he meant to stick to the spanner.

Then Railton's arm went round his neck, and he began to hope. On the narrow stage, where one could not get about, the other's weight and muscular force counted for much; but he was a fool to clinch. When one wrestled by Cumberland rules one

did not need much room. Kit was something of a wrestler, and he knew his antagonist was not. In fact, if he could brace up for a minute or two, Railton would pay for his rashness. Kit had turned his head and the fellow could not hit his face, and for him to use his heavy boots was risky. Railton's legs would soon be occupied.

Kit spread his legs, took a smashing blow on his ribs, and grimly felt for a good hold. When a Cumberland wrestler gets a good hold the struggle is over. Gasping and straining, he leaned forward and locked his arms round the other's back. Then he stiffened his body, set his mouth, and lifted.

Railton's feet left the boards and he swayed in Kit's tense arms. His body bent and his legs went up. Kit, battered and exhausted, let go and fell against the forge. Somebody shouted, men ran across the platform, and Kit saw Railton was not about. The fellow was in the river. Kit pushed back the others and jumped.

The plunge braced him, and when he came up his dizziness was gone. Not far off he saw Railton's head. The fellow tossed about in the broken water behind the columns, and when Kit tried to reach the spot an eddy swung him round. Railton vanished, but a few moments afterwards Kit's leg was seized and he was strongly pulled down. He got loose and reached the surface. Railton came up behind him, pushed Kit's head under, and let him go.

Kit, fighting for breath, went down-stream. He thought he heard the men on the stage laugh, and he began to see the joke. He had gone to help a

first-class swimmer. Railton, a yard or two off, turned and gave him a humorous grin.

"You have surely got some gall! Steer for the bank. I'll see you through."

They were carried down-stream, and when they struggled in the eddies along the steep bank Railton, a yard or two in front, seized a willow branch and stretched out his hand.

"Hang on, sonny! I'll boost you up."

"If you leave me alone, I can get up," Kit gasped.

"Get a holt," said Railton. "You're going to be pulled up."

Kit thought he saw a light. The men on the bridge were interested, and Railton played for their applause.

"Very well," he said. "I stick to the spanner."

"That's so," Railton agreed, and seized Kit's hand.

The current swept Kit into the tree, and crawling through the branches, he reached the bank. Railton pulled him up a steep pitch, and at the top they saw a man on the path whose clothes were not a workman's clothes.

"Mr. Austin! Now I beat it," said Railton, and plunged into the trees.

Kit stopped. He was battered, and doubted if he could go very fast. Moreover, to jump for the brush was ridiculous. He turned and faced the young fellow who gave him the cigarettes at Winnipeg station. Austin studied him with a twinkle. Kit's face was cut and the water ran from his greasy clothes.

"You have rather obviously got up against it," Austin remarked. "What was the trouble?"

"I don't know that it was very important. Railton claimed a spanner I didn't think was his," Kit replied.

"A forge spanner? Well, I've known Bill grumble about his tools vanishing, but a number of the boys stopped for some minutes to watch the fight, and the company won't stand for your holding up the gang."

"I was not at all keen to fight, but I felt I must get the spanner," said Kit, in an apologetic voice.

"Steve Railton's a hefty fellow," Austin remarked. "Since you threw him off the stage, perhaps your jumping after him was humorous."

"The joke was, I went to help a man who swims better than I. No doubt you noted he pulled me into the willows."

"I imagine Steve wanted the boys to note it," said Austin dryly. "Another time, you must wait until the whistle blows."

He let Kit go, and Kit, starting for the forge, gave Bill the spanner.

"I got it, but the job was harder than I thought."

"Looks like that," the smith agreed. "Did Steve put you in the river?"

"I put Steve in," Kit replied modestly. "Then I thought I ought to go after him. I didn't know he could swim."

"You have surely got some gall," said the smith with a hoarse laugh, and resumed his hammering.

Kit noted the laugh. Although he had not known Bill laugh before, the fellow was human; but he had begun to shiver and he pulled off his wet clothes. The forge was very hot and the garments he did not pull off would soon dry. Kit could not put on other clothes because his trunk had not yet arrived.

CHAPTER XV

KIT MAKES PROGRESS

FOR two or three weeks Kit was strenuously, and on the whole happily, occupied at the forge. When the sun was on the roof the iron shack got very hot, and sometimes the labor was severe, but Kit was interested and the pay was good. His trunk, broken by the baggage gang, had arrived, and in the cool evenings to put on clean clothes and play the violin for an attentive audience was some relief. Then he liked the smith. Bill was sternly quiet and admitted he had no use for politeness. As a rule, when he did talk, his remarks were aggressive, but he was a skilful workman and asked from his helper nothing he himself did not undertake.

For all that, Kit sometimes brooded. If he remained until the bridge was built he would not be rich, and his ambition was not to help a smith. Moreover, he feared when the frost began the company would pay him off, and in the North winter work was hard to get. Then he had promised he would not, for a stipulated time, write to Evelyn. She would be anxious for him, and since he had work, of a sort, he wanted her to know.

Sometimes he speculated about Alison. She was

at Fairmead, and although the settlement was not far off, it was on another line. Kit did not know if she would stay for long, and when he put her on the car at Winnipeg he felt they said good-bye for good. All the same, he was sorry. Alison was a first-class pal; but she was gone, and he was Evelyn's lover and must concentrate on mending his broken fortunes.

When dusk began to fall one evening, he put up his violin and lighted his pipe. The men had gone to the bunk-house and all was quiet. Kit heard the current break against the piers, and in the distance cow-bells faintly chimed. He thought about the river that ran by the oaks at Netherhall. Somehow when he pictured Netherhall it was summer afternoon, and Evelyn and he walked in the shade. The cow-bells, however, struck a foreign note, and when Kit heard mosquitoes he frowned.

By and by Austin came along the track. He was an athletic young fellow, but his look was thoughtful. Kit began to think the Canadians' habit was to concentrate. None he so far knew was remarkably light-hearted.

"I heard you play," said Austin. "You have some talent; but for a construction camp, was not the music rather good?"

"The boys did not grumble. My notion is, uncultivated people like better music than some composers think. Anyhow, I risked it. I don't know that I have much talent, but two or three Canadians informed me that I have some gall."

Austin smiled, for he thought the compliment justified. In a rather stern country, Kit's joyous carelessness struck a foreign note. Then he was in-

dependent, and North American democracy cultivates a type. All the same, Austin noted that when he began to talk Kit got up. Since work had stopped, Austin did not want the other to acknowledge him boss, and he sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"Well, Bill wants to keep you, and he's pretty fastidious about his helpers. I don't know what you think about staying; but I don't know your proper occupation."

Kit hesitated. Austin was friendly, but Kit did not want to use his friendliness. He admitted he was perhaps extravagantly proud.

"When I arrived I was a strolling musician and was glad to fiddle for my supper," he said. "So long as Bill thinks me useful, I'm satisfied to remain."

"Wheeler, the construction boss, is willing. I expect you know Miss Forsyth has got a post at Fairmead?"

"I don't know," said Kit, and his glance got keen. "In fact, I don't altogether see——"

"You may remember the lady who talked to Miss Forsyth at Winnipeg station? Well, sometimes I go home week-ends to Fairmead, and not long ago we met Miss Forsyth. She's clerk at a creamery and was interested to know you were at the bridge."

"Fairmead's on the other line. Do you go to Winnipeg?"

"The conductor's allowed to stop the cars at Willows, and a flag station on the other line is not far."

Kit saw Austin thought him keen to go; in fact, he admitted Austin had perhaps some grounds to think him Alison's lover. When Kit stated he did

not know she had got a post, Austin was clearly puzzled.

"Oh, well," he said, "if I can get leave I'd like to see Miss Forsyth; but I mustn't ask for a holiday yet. Anyhow, your stopping for a few moments at the waiting-room was kind. Before you came along we felt rather forlorn."

"Something of the sort was plain. The crowd was a foreign crowd and you were British. Then we saw your violin-case, and we doubted if you knew Canada, which for a beginner is a pretty hard country. Well, Carrie and I were going home, and the contrast was rather marked. I expect it accounted for our stopping."

Kit wondered. Alison had accounted for the others' stopping and he thought her supposition accurate. He began to talk about the bridge, and after a time Austin went to his office.

On the whole, Kit thought he would not go to Fairmead. For one thing, the journey was awkward and they were busily occupied at the forge. Moreover, he doubted if he ought to go. Alison's charm was strong and he was flesh and blood.

A week or two afterwards, when he raked up the fire one evening, Bill gave him some patterns he marked by chalk.

"You'll take the templates to Mr. Austin. I can make the truck the way he wants, but a square end costs less to forge and leaves more metal when you cut the slot. You want to show him——"

Kit noted the smith's remarks and after supper started for Austin's office. The evening was cold and the woods were wet. For two or three days

the rain had not stopped, and big drops splashed in the trampled mud along the track.

When Kit pushed back the door Austin looked up and frowned. The lamp was lighted and the small room was hot, but Austin sat by the stove and had pulled a rug across his legs. When he saw Kit he put a drawing-board on the floor.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired.

Kit told him, and Austin examined the patterns. "So long as the slots will take the cotters, Bill can forge the ends as he likes. But sit down and smoke a cigarette."

"It looks as if you were busy——"

"I'm willing to stop," said Austin, and shivered. "My back hurts and my head aches. A chill, maybe. The rain was pretty fierce and I used up all my dry clothes. Since I lay out in the mud at Paschendaele I can't stand for much wet and cold."

"Then you were in the big fight?"

"For twenty-four hours I was in a flooded shell-hole, and when the stretcher-bearers found me I went to the hospital—a broken leg and rheumatic fever. All the use they had for me afterwards was at a base camp. Were you in France?"

They talked about their adventures, but by and by Austin threw his cigarette in the stove and gave Kit the drawing-board.

"My tobacco's not good, and the plan must be ready in the morning. Perhaps you can reckon up the rivet-holes; I own I cannot. The spacing's even and the holes must not finish on an odd number. I get one short."

Kit used Austin's scale and dividers. "The holes

are accurately spaced. I expect you didn't note that the end rivet goes through the gusset-plate."

"You have got it!" Austin agreed, and resolved to experiment, for he saw Kit knew the use of drawing-tools.

"Another thing rather bothers me, and when I get a chill I'm not very bright," he resumed. "The drawings of the girders on the wall were made at the head office, but I'm not satisfied about the bars in tension. I don't want to bother Wheeler; sometimes he gets annoyed."

Kit carried the drawings to the table and was absorbed. He did not see Austin studied him, and he forgot he was the smith's helper. He thought the plan typically American. The scheme was bold and imaginative, and the engineers did not follow old-fashioned rules. Their object was to save labor and build with speed. Kit approved, but when he examined a detail plan he knitted his brows. The fellows were bolder than he had thought and his interest carried him away.

"In tension, the ties would carry twenty-five tons to the square inch," he said. "Your safety margin is not very large."

"The margin is large enough. In Canada we don't build bridges for our grandchildren. We reckon they will not have much use for locomotives like ours."

"It's possible," said Kit. "All the same, your diagonal braces take some transverse strain, and you must reckon on the shearing effort across the bolts. I'd straighten three or four members. Like this——"

He got a pencil, and Austin, with some surprise, studied the sketch. He thought Kit had solved the puzzle, and he resolved to talk to Wheeler about it in the morning. Kit was not the man to stay at the forge.

"You are satisfied your plan would work?"

"If the job were mine I'd try it; but I'm not a bridge architect," Kit replied modestly.

"Then what are you?" Austin inquired.

Kit looked up and colored. Austin's eyes were fixed on him and his glance was keen.

"In the Old Country I was a shipbuilder's draftsman."

"Now I begin to see. The drawing office got monotonous?"

"Not at all," said Kit. "I was fired."

Austin remarked his frankness, but he had reckoned on Kit's being frank.

"Are you willing to talk about it?"

"I don't see much use in talking. The company's firing somebody was logical. I claimed they had not spotted the proper man. But you're not very well, and I expect you're tired."

Austin agreed, and Kit went back to the bunkhouse. In the morning a workman arrived at the forge.

"The boss wants Carson at the office," he said.

Kit went with the man, who stopped at the door.

"The gang dropped a big tie-rod overboard, and I guess he's riled. You want to watch out," he remarked, and vanished.

Somebody ordered Kit to come in, and when he rather nervously advanced Wheeler got up and put

a plan on the table. Wheeler was a big fellow and his loose slicker exaggerated his bulkiness. His face was fleshy, his mouth was hard and his glance commanding. Kit knew him for a good engineer and something of a bully.

"Study up that bow-girder," he said. "The load she's designed for is marked. Well, suppose we sent an extra big locomotive across, where do you reckon she'd go through?"

"It's obvious," Kit replied, and indicated the spot.

"Then how'd you strengthen her for a double load?"

"I think I'd sooner build a fresh bridge; but I don't know much about bridges."

"You're not a railroad treasurer," Wheeler rejoined. "Well, a construction problem is a construction problem, whether you get up against it in a bridge or, for example, a ship. Suppose you were forced to strengthen the girder, where'd you start. Take ten minutes for a rough sketch. Use the tools in front of you."

Kit got to work and Wheeler lighted a cigar. By and by he picked up the sketch.

"You were at an English shipyard. Why did you quit?"

"Since Mr. Austin knows, I expect you know."

"Austin does not know much," said Wheeler dryly. "I can't force you to talk."

"A draftsman gave away some improvements the company could not patent. The chiefs suspected me."

Wheeler nodded. He knew men, and he thought if Kit had cheated he would have talked at length.

"Well, there was no use in your applying at another yard? When you resolved to pull out, why did you fix on Canada?"

"Montreal was nearer than Melbourne. Then, you see, for a long time our folks were engineers and interested in Canadian industries."

Kit imagined Wheeler looked at him rather hard.

"I expect Carsons are pretty numerous in the Old Country, but you state your lot are engineers. Do you know Jasper Carson?"

"Jasper Carson of the Yorkshire forge is my uncle."

"I reckon he could have got you a fresh engagement."

"In the circumstances, I didn't want to bother my relations. When I started for Canada I doubt if Jasper Carson knew where I went."

Wheeler smiled, as if he saw a joke. "And you hit our bridge and hired up to help the smith? Well, you surely have——"

"To begin with, I helped the cook," Kit interrupted. "I doubt if I have much gall, and I'd sooner know if you think I have some talent for engineering."

"We'll try you out," Wheeler replied with a chuckle, as if the joke got better. "On Monday you'll go to Austin's office, and if he thinks you useful, we'll fix your pay. In the meantime your job's at the forge. Get to it."

Kit went back to the forge. He was puzzled but triumphant. In a few days he would resume his proper occupation, and he felt he made some progress.

CHAPTER XVI

KIT GOES VISITING

KIT pushed some calculations across the office table, and tilting his chair against the wall, put his feet on the stove. His gum boots were battered, but his clothes were good. His shirt was striped and his blue tie was knitted silk. The color harmonized with his blue eyes and sunburned skin. Scale drawings and patterns covered the cracked matchboard walls. Oil-drums occupied a corner, and measuring tools were on the table. In the austerely utilitarian office Kit's careless pose was somehow foreign.

Austin concentrated on some plans. His clothes were gray and his look was sober. Kit thought the tools and oil-drums were in the picture; Bob, so to speak, was utilitarian. He had recently married, and sometimes Kit speculated about Mrs. Austin. By and by Kit lighted a cigarette.

"To slack up is something fresh, but on the whole I think I'm entitled to take a quiet smoke. I'd sooner play the fiddle, but Wheeler is about, and to inform the camp I'm relaxing might be rash. In Canada you're a strenuous lot."

"I expect that is so," Austin agreed. "Canada's a hard country; one's forced to hustle."

"You like to hustle; you feel loafing's wrong. One senses the Puritan vein, and I imagine your ancestors were the folks we shipped off to New England when they made us tired. The reformation had some drawbacks. It banished the joy of life."

"I reckon the Puritans went and had some trouble to make their get-away," Austin rejoined. "My folks, however, are Ontario Scots, good old-fashioned Presbyterians. You're another stamp, and I like your sporting clothes. I expect you burned the other lot?"

"Not at all," said Kit. "I gave Pete a dollar to boil the articles and they are in the trunk your baggage-handlers smashed. In the North of England we are not extravagant. Then, although my luck's been pretty good, sometimes one's luck turns." He paused and gave Austin a friendly smile when he resumed: "I expect I owe my getting a soft job to your meddling, Bob."

"Oh, shucks! Wheeler's pretty keen, and he had spotted you; but I want to talk about another thing. Wheeler will be around for the week-end, and since all is pretty straight I expect he'd give us a holiday. I'm going to Fairmead, and Carrie wants to meet you. Will you come along?"

"If Wheeler agrees, I'll be happy to go," said Kit.

Wheeler was willing, and when the construction train went down the line Kit was on board. A battered car waited at a flag-station by a tank and carried them noisily across the plain. Summer and

the boisterous winds and thunderstorms were gone. The afternoon was calm, and after his labors at the bridge Kit got a sense of brooding tranquillity. In the foreground the grass was gray and silver; in the distance all was misty blue. The sunshine touched the bluffs and ponds with subdued yellow light.

The plain rolled, and the trail went up rises and plunged into ravines. Sometimes it curved round fences, and when fresh wire blocked the way the driver swore.

"The blamed country's filling up," he said. "Not long since you could drive straight to the United States. Soon you'll be forced to keep the road reserve."

Brick homesteads and windmill frames began to dot the prairie, and Kit saw belts of wheat. Sometimes the binders' varnished arms tossed in the tall grain, but for the most part red-gold stooks dotted the long fields. Wagons rolled about the stubble, smoke trailed languidly across the sky, and dust clouds marked the spots where the threshers were at work.

One machine was near the trail, and Kit saw chaff and beaten straw fall like a yellow cataract from the elevator. Where the stuff came down sweating men piled bags of grain.

"A prairie wheat bin; the fellow means to hold his crop," Austin remarked. "When I first knew the prairie the storekeeper took the lot and charged ten per cent. on the bill he carried over. He couldn't take the farm, because another fellow held a mortgage. When the farmer had had enough, he quit, and all his creditors found was a notice, 'Pulled

out for British Columbia.' The hard men stayed with it, and although some grumble they acknowledge they got their reward. Well, railroading's strenuous, but by contrast with farming I reckon it easy. What's your notion, Dick?"

The driver turned and grinned. "I'd sooner drive a flivver over the meanest trail. Them fellows began at sun-up and they won't stop so long as they can see. Packing two-hundred-pound wheat-bags soon makes me tired."

"But what helped the farmers to make good?" Kit asked.

"In Canada the question is, *who* helped? You think us a sober lot, but Nature's our antagonist, and the fight is pretty stern. At the beginning, the settlers' wheat rusted, was hailed out, and frozen in the fall. Then the scientific experimenter got to work. He cross-fertilized the plants and grew wheat that ripened before the frost arrived. To haul wheat a long distance to the elevators is expensive, and our railroad engineers pushed branch tracks across the plains. We don't go where the traffic waits; we shove ahead into the wilds and the traffic follows us. Our roads are rough, but the cars get there."

"In Manitoba railroads will soon be numerous," Kit remarked. "For all that, cultivation's spotty. The province is an old province, but one crosses belts where one does not see a homestead. How do you account for it?"

"Now I'm beaten! Perhaps our temperament accounts for something. We like fresh ground, and we like to go as far as possible. In the sandy belts, blowing grit cuts the wheat, and in places the

water's alkaline. All the same, when you can get *gumbo* soil in Manitoba, to start for the Peace River isn't sensible. In fact, on the plains settlement's capricious. Saskatoon, so to speak, sprang up, but Regina's growth was slow. Brandon's old and small, and Fairmead, for example, has not grown for twenty years."

"Quit talking and hold tight!" said the driver, and they plunged into a ravine.

Somehow they got round the corner by the narrow bridge, but the front wing was over the creek. On the hill in front the car rocked, rattled savagely, and stopped.

"She won't make it with three aboard," said the driver. "You got to get down and shove."

Kit and Austin jumped down, and at a soft spot the other joined them, but he did not stop the engine.

"The rut will hold her straight, and I guess she won't get away from us," he said.

Kit looked up the curving trail. The boggy soil was torn by wheels and the pitch was very steep. Small poplars and willows covered the awkward slope.

"I think you might risk it."

"When Blain was riding to the station one day his car stalled. He got down to shove some brush under her wheels. She knocked him over and went off."

"Where did she go?" Kit inquired.

"I wasn't around," said the driver. "Blain allowed she went up a tree!"

They pushed the car up the hill, and when they

got on board Kit remarked: "To haul their wheat across must bother the farmers."

"They use the new elevators along our line," Austin replied. "Before the track was built they dumped their loads at the bridge and carried the bags across the boggy piece. A four-bushel bag weighs pretty near two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Something of a job where ravines are numerous!" said Kit in a thoughtful voice. "One likes the fellows' pluck."

By and by they got down at a small station, and soon afterwards a black smoke plume rolled across the plain. The locomotive hauled two cars, and Kit, sitting by a window, saw shining ponds, birch and poplar bluffs, and rows of stooked sheaves on yellow stubble. The light was going, but men and teams labored in the fields and the smoke from the threshers floated about the sky.

At Fairmead three grain elevators like castles broke the sweep of plain. Dim lights burned behind high windows and wheels throbbed. Dark boxcars blocked the tracks and a yard locomotive pushed a fresh row across the switches. The beams from the engines' headlamps joined, and for half a mile the silver light flashed along a waiting train. The new wheat was going East.

When Kit left the station he thought Fairmead marked by a prosperous and friendly calm. The wide street was evenly graded and went up a gentle incline. The wooden sidewalks were broad and level, and a printed notice warned strangers that one was fined for expectorating on the boards.

Two wooden hotels and three or four stores occu-

pied the bottom of the hill, and Kit noted indistinct groups on the verandas and the grocery steps. Behind the sidewalks were trees and garden lots. The trees were small, for the prairie winds are keen, and the gardens were not fenced. To look up the hill was like looking across a long, narrow lawn.

Kit thought the little frame houses picturesque, but they got indistinct and for the most part the lamps were not lighted. The evening was calm, and quiet voices indicated that family groups took the air by the front porch. One, however, heard mosquitoes, and sometimes Kit rubbed his neck. He approved Fairmead. For a prairie settlement, the town was old, and it looked as if the citizens were rather tranquilly satisfied than vulgarly ambitious.

At the top of the street Austin went up a short path. Lights pierced the trees in front of a house, and Kit thought about the evening Alison and he went drearily along the avenue by the river at Winnipeg. Now he was not a stranger, but he speculated about Alison. He wondered whether she was happy, and resolved to find out.

A woman came down the steps and kissed Austin. She gave Kit her hand and they went into the house. The matchboarded hall was narrow, and when Mrs. Austin pushed back a door Kit stopped, for Alison got up from a chair in the little room. Her clothes were fashionable, her pose was confident, and her look was bright. Kit had known she had charm, but now he felt her charm was marked, and when he saw her smile was for Austin he was moved by unreasonable jealousy. Then she saw Kit, and a touch of color came to her skin.

"Why, Kit! I didn't know——"

Kit advanced, and when Alison gave him her hand her look was frank and kind.

"I didn't know," he said. "The joke is Mrs. Austin's. All the same, I meant to look you up."

Alison said nothing. She could talk to Kit again, and she wondered. On the whole, she thought Mrs. Austin experimented.

Mrs. Austin beckoned Kit and he was presented to Miss Florence Grey. Miss Grey declared politely she was pleased to meet him, but he felt her searching glance was hostile. Moreover, he was puzzled. Alison had talked about joining an English friend, but he thought Miss Grey altogether North American. Her accent, her clothes, and her rather aggressive look certainly were not English.

"You were some time at the bridge?" she said, as if Kit's being there was an offense.

"That is so," he agreed. "When they allowed me to stop I was lucky."

"Perhaps your job's important," Miss Grey remarked. "Bob Austin comes over week-ends, but then he's a boss."

"I dare say that explains it. You see, the boys eat on Sundays, and when you help the cook you can't very well get off."

"Don't I know?" said Miss Grey in a scornful voice. "For some time I was at a prairie farm, and loafing men eat double. But did you help the cook?"

"Sure," said Kit. "I cut potatoes, fried pork, and cleaned the plates."

Miss Grey coolly studied him. Kit's clothes were

good; he was rather a handsome fellow and one got a hint of cultivation.

"Then, since they let you stop, I reckon your luck was good."

"One on you, Kit!" said Austin. "But supper's ready. Come along."

They went to another room, and when Kit saw Miss Grey opposite him across the table he was rather resigned than pleased. She, however, was Alison's friend and he gave her an interested glance. She was thin and her mouth was ominously firm, but although her look was scornful he thought her sincere. Her color was not, like Alison's, delicate and fresh. Miss Grey had occupied small rooms and borne the stove's dry heat; she, rather evidently, used powder.

"You're a Toronto girl, Carrie," she remarked to Mrs. Austin. "Toronto folks have homes and don't live at restaurants. I hope you won't hustle us. I like to squander a few minutes over supper."

"We will not get up until you wish to, and if you like, we'll stop for half an hour. How long do they allow you at the bridge, Mr. Carson?"

"At the bunk-house ten minutes, and as a rule I was left. When Bob and I dine at the office fifteen minutes sees us out. You're a hospitable lot, but to hold on for half an hour at Western speed is impossible."

"Then you think us hospitable?"

"I have some grounds, ma'am. When I got off the cars, I was tired and hungry, but my wad was five dollars, and I saw I must not be extravagant——"

"Was that all, Kit?" Alison inquired, and blushed.

"About five dollars," said Kit with some embarrassment. "Well, a storekeeper gave me an iced drink and a can of fruit. At the bridge the cook gave me supper and appointed me his musician. Soon afterwards a man I met on the cars got me a job at the forge. When you know yourself a stranger things like that weigh."

"Jock's a Scot," Austin remarked.

"He was born in Scotland, and the storekeeper stated he was sent out by an English orphanage; but they're now Canadians. One observes that when an Old Country man has been a few years in Canada he is stanchly Canadian. I expect the fellows who don't like you soon go back."

"It's possible," said Austin and gave Miss Grey a smile. "You're good mixers."

Florence Grey looked up and her eyes sparkled. "In England I was poor and nobody had much use for me. For long I went without proper food; I wore shabby clothes and lived at crowded lodgings. In Manitoba I got a fighting chance and fair pay for all I did. I'm happy at Fairmead and my friends are good. Canada's my country; I've no use for the other."

Austin was quiet and Kit said nothing. He thought Miss Grey challenged him, but he was not going to dispute. Although he thought poverty did not altogether account for her bitterness, her argument was logical.

"I rather think in Canada we use a standard model," Mrs. Austin remarked. "We are a democ-

racy, and a democracy works for a uniform type. Well, it has some advantages——"

"So long as the type's a good type, ma'am," said Kit.

Mrs. Austin smiled. "Your approval's flattering, but I have known Englishmen who did not agree. Their model was not our model. There's the drawback of standardizing."

By and by she got up. Austin went with Kit and Alison to another room, put out some cigarettes, and vanished. A rattling noise indicated that Mrs. Austin carried off the plates, and Kit thought Bob and Miss Grey helped. All was strangely like the suppers at Blake's flat, but Kit did not want to dwell on that. Alison occupied the little couch, and he would sooner talk.

"Perhaps the couch suggests it, but I see you on the bench at Winnipeg station," he remarked.

"Ah," said Alison. "don't you see the emigrants lying about the flags?"

"They're the background for the picture," said Kit. "When I think about the waiting-room, the crowd is indistinct."

Alison gave him a friendly smile. "You cheated me on the train. You forced me to take your sleeper ticket, and I did not pay for half the food. Yet all you had was five dollars."

"You didn't get half the food," Kit rejoined. "Perhaps I was not quite honest about the ticket, but I admitted my dishonesty before."

"Well, I oughtn't to be embarrassed because you were kind; but I didn't know, and, by contrast, I

was rich. Besides, I was going to Florence, and you had not a friend."

"I had my fiddle, and the trail was open. I'd wanted to be a minstrel and I got my chance, but I admit I didn't reckon on fiddling for the cook."

"In a way, it was humorous," said Alison in a gentle voice. "When Austin told me I laughed, but I wasn't altogether amused. Sometimes one laughs when one is sorry. Yet I liked to think about your getting up at daybreak and playing for the men. You see, Austin talked about you; he knew I was interested."

Kit was rather embarrassed. Alison had followed his adventures, but he had not bothered to find out about her. All the same, he had wanted to find out. The obstacle was, he was going to marry Evelyn, and he was flesh and blood.

"I'd sooner you told me something about yourself," he said.

"Alison indulged him. She had found a post at a creamery. On the whole, she liked the post and the pay was good. That was all. When she stopped Miss Grey came in.

"On the plains men help clean up after supper, but I expect you had enough at the camp," she said to Kit. "Your sort's fastidious."

"Do you know my sort?" Kit inquired.

"Oh, yes. In the Old Country I knew one or two like you. The stamp is plain, but in Manitoba it's not admired."

Kit was puzzled. He wondered whether Miss Grey was antagonistic to the stamp she thought he

wore or to him himself. To see Mrs. Austin arrive was some relief.

"Oh, well," he said. "I have cleaned supper plates, and my notion is, where food must be served and the tables cleared at high speed, a man can beat a very active woman. Would you like to try?"

"Mrs Austin's plates are thin, and in Canada crockery is expensive. The food men cook at construction camps only construction gangs can eat."

"Yet you declare I'm fastidious!"

"I expect you were hungry. A man's appetite is remarkable," Miss Grey rejoined.

"You must not dispute, and Mr. Carson is going to play for us," said Mrs. Austin, and Kit tuned his violin.

At ten o'clock Miss Grey stated firmly that she and Alison must go, and Kit turned to Austin.

"Cannot we fix up a picnic for to-morrow, Bob? I expect I could get a car."

"Your idea's good. Lost Lake's picturesque," Austin agreed.

"You mustn't reckon on me," said Miss Grey. "If I go, Ted Harries will drive me to the lake."

"But you will go with Mrs. Austin?" Kit asked Alison.

"I'd like to go," said Alison, and when she went off all was arranged.

Mrs. Austin did not come back from the porch, and Austin gave Kit a cigarette.

"Florence rather got after you!"

"I really don't see why I annoyed her. I felt as apologetic as I felt when I faced the lady at the railroad inquiry office."

Austin smiled. "Florence is certainly fierce, but she's stanch, and so long as she is about nobody will hurt Alison. When she arrived she was employed as bookkeeper at Jason's grocery. Jason's old and something of a slouch; his wife is an invalid, but they were good to Florence and she's a first-class business woman. When she took control all went straight, and Jason's customers found out they must meet their bills. The opposition store tried to bribe her by high pay, but Florence stops with Jason. Now perhaps you get her. Well, let's join Carrie on the porch."

CHAPTER XVII

LOST LAKE

A LIGHT wind moved the poplar branches and sparkling ripples rolled across Lost Lake. Along the margin the cracked mud was white with salt; the leaves in the bluff were going yellow and cut the turquoise sky. In the distance belts of stubble reflected the sunshine and withered grass rolled back to the horizon. The lake was perhaps not beautiful, but Kit acknowledged the spacious landscape's tranquil charm.

At one time Lost Lake was a landmark for the Hudson Bay *courreurs* steering south behind their dog-teams for the Assiniboine. Now a wagon trail went by the bluff, and, some distance off, railroad telegraph posts melted in the grass. The *courreurs* were long since gone, and on summer holidays picnic parties from two prairie towns arrived on board noisy automobiles.

Alison occupied a birch log under the trees; Kit lay in the grass and smoked. A hundred yards off Austin was engaged at the car. It looked as if he were annoyed and Mrs. Austin soothed him.

"Carrie's proper plan is to leave Bob alone," said Kit. "If she stops much longer I expect he will

break something. When you're up against an obstinate engine to talk politely is hard."

"Perhaps one ought to use some control," Alison remarked. "But you are an engineer. Cannot you help?"

"I doubt," said Kit. "The makers claim a flivver's foolproof, and my clothes are rather good. Then until Bob's satisfied he won't stop. The engine ought not to knock, and he's resolved to see it does not. Since the car is not his, I don't think he's reasonable."

"Your argument is rather labored. You feel you must justify your selfishness?"

"Sometimes selfishness is justified, and I expect Miss Grey will soon arrive. It looks as if she thought I ought not to talk to you unless she's about. Well, I want to talk to you; I don't want to dispute with your friend."

Alison smiled. "Florence is a useful friend, and she does not really dislike you. She rather doubts all she thinks you stand for."

"Since she's aggressively democratic and I stand for small pay and strenuous labor, I don't see much light."

"Florence is keen," said Alison and gave Kit a thoughtful glance. "She thinks you the English college and country house type: for example, the Netherhall type."

"Sometimes I did stop at Netherhall for a holiday, but it was not my home. My father was not rich, and my poverty's obvious. Why does Miss Grey hate the Netherhall type?"

"I don't altogether know, Kit, but I feel she has

good grounds—— Well, I oughtn't to speculate about it, and I owe her much. She got me my post at the creamery, and, in order to be with me, she stops at the boarding-house. We have one room, the dining-room, for fourteen people; you cannot be alone, and sometimes you get tired of the crowd."

"A crowd is tiresome," Kit agreed in a sympathetic voice. "In Canada one is never alone. The Canadians are a co-operative, gregarious lot; anyhow they go about in flocks. If Miss Grey went to another house, I expect she would not get much space and quiet."

"The grocery is large. Jason is old and his wife gets infirm. They are kind people and want Florence to live with them; but, for my sake, she comes to the boarding-house as soon as the store is shut."

"Ah," said Kit, "I begin to like Miss Grey; but if she had waited a little longer I would not have grumbled——"

He indicated a large red motorcycle. A tall thin young man leaned over the handles and his glance was fixed in front; Miss Grey was on the carrier, and her clothes blew in the wind. The machine lurched and jolted, the engine fired explosively, and the blue exhaust stained the tossing dust. Kit, studying the broken trail, understood the driver's concentration. At the edge of the bluff Miss Grey jumped down and the other stopped the motorcycle.

"She made it!" he shouted in a triumphant voice. "The sand belt was fierce, but we went through like a snow-plow."

"We came off twice," Miss Grey remarked, and beat her dusty clothes.

Then she called her companion, and Kit was presented to Mr. Ted Harries. Harries was tall and carried himself awkwardly. His bony wrists and ankles were conspicuous, as if his clothes had been made for a standard figure. Miss Grey stated that he was a grain storage company's clerk, and he gave Kit a friendly grin.

"You're the fellow who put the railroad man off the bridge? I'm surely pleased to meet you. If you'll put my boss off the elevator, I'll loan you my wheel."

"I mightn't be as lucky another time. To know where to stop is useful," Kit remarked.

"See you again," said Harries and seized Miss Grey. "Bob Austin's up against it, and maybe I can help him out. Come on, Florence! Alison has no use for you!"

Kit laughed. "I think I like Ted! Florence is gone, but I imagine she means to come back, and you have not yet told me much about Fairmead. For example, where did you meet Mrs. Austin?"

"She was at the grocery when I went for Florence one evening, and she knew me. She and Bob had come from the train and were bothered because their house was not ready. In an hour Florence put all straight. At the settlement she's important."

"It's rather plain. When Harries firmly led her off I thought his nerve was good. But perhaps Miss Grey approves his type?"

Alison smiled. "I think Ted attracts Florence because he's a contrast from another she knew in England; but you inquired about the Austins. Carrie's charming, and to go to her house is like

going home. Then she's cultivated; I think her father was a lecturer at Toronto University, but she's happy to keep her husband's house, and although they must be frugal she does not grumble. I expect you know Austin's pay is not large. Perhaps it's strange, but I think people who are poor are kindest."

"Bob's a first-class sort and to know his wife's your friend is some relief. But do you like your job at the creamery?"

"I'm satisfied. I was not as rich before, and so long as I carry out my orders nobody bothers me. I don't know about the winter, but if I'm not wanted, Florence thinks she can get me another post."

"Well, I like to know you're content. For a time I was rather disturbed about you."

"Yet you did not inquire," Alison remarked in a quiet voice.

"That is so," Kit admitted with some embarrassment. "All the same——"

He stopped, for Alison gave him a queer smile.

"You thought you ought not? Well, a good friend is worth much, and I'd sooner not think you were altogether willing to let me go. But Austin has put the engine straight, and Carrie wants help to serve our lunch."

She joined Mrs. Austin, but Kit stopped and pondered. His emotions were rather mixed, but he was glad Alison had not wanted him to let her go. Now he thought about it, it was all she had really told him. Alison did not try to move one; one liked her for her friendly calm.

Lunch was a cheerful and rather noisy function,

for Florence and Harries disputed and sometimes she entangled Kit in humorous argument. When the meal was over and the others went off he helped Mrs. Austin clean the plates. He knew she wanted him to stop, and after they re-packed the basket he brought her a rug and sat in the grass. The wind dropped and the calm lake shone. The afternoon was hot, but the shadow of the bluff crept across the spot.

Mrs. Austin was young, but Kit, studying her, got a sense of maturity; he knew her thoughtful and sincere. Although she was obviously cultivated, she was somehow franker than the Englishwomen he had known. She told him to smoke and he lighted a cigarette. He felt she waited for him to talk, and although she did not indicate the line she wanted him to take, he thought he knew.

"Until Bob told me Miss Forsyth was at the creamery and came to your house I was anxious for her," he said. "Now I know she has good friends, I want to thank you, ma'am."

"We thought you philosophical," Mrs. Austin remarked, and gave him a steady glance.

Kit hesitated, and then took a photograph from his wallet.

"The ground's awkward; but perhaps the portrait makes things plainer."

Mrs. Austin studied the picture. The girl was beautiful and somehow thoroughbred. To contrast her and Alison was perhaps ridiculous. For one thing, Alison was not beautiful; yet she had a charm the other had not.

"I think I see! You are going to marry the English girl?"

"If I make good—Alison knows," Kit replied. "I feel I must make good. When others doubted and all was dark, Evelyn trusted me. I expect you know why I lost my English post?"

Mrs. Austin gave him back the portrait and her look was kind.

"Yes. Bob thinks you did not tell him all, and the shipyard chief did not spot the proper man."

"I felt I ought to satisfy you," said Kit with an apologetic smile. "You have helped Alison and I owe Bob much. In fact, now I think about it, when we met you at Winnipeg our luck began to turn. Well, I suppose you imagined—I don't know about Alison, but I was embarrassed."

"In some circumstances a girl is less embarrassed than a man. I rather think Alison saw why we tried to encourage you."

Kit said nothing, and Mrs. Austin resumed: "Well, I admit I was romantically sympathetic. I had not long before promised to marry Bob."

"Then I suppose Bob was at Toronto? Toronto's your home town?"

"Bob was at the University; I talked to him for ten minutes at a college function. Afterwards I did not see him until I visited relations at Winnipeg, three weeks before we met you at the station waiting-room."

For a few moments Kit mused. Mrs. Austin was frank, and he wondered whether she meant to indicate that she was his friend.

"Ah," he said, "I suppose one knows——"

Mrs. Austin smiled, but he thought the look she gave him queer.

"One knows the real thing."

Kit wondered. For long he had hoped to marry Evelyn, if he got rich; but until he must start for Canada she had not moved him to keen romantic passion. All the same, one did not talk about things like that, and he must not bore Mrs. Austin.

"Fairmead's an attractive spot; but after Toronto I expect it's sometimes dreary," he said. "The advantage is, Bob can get home from the bridge."

"The advantage is important; but I doubt if we will stay for long. Bob's ambitious and has talent. Besides, the bridge will presently be built."

"It will not be built before the river freezes and much of the work must stop; but I understand, as far as possible, the engineers will carry on."

"Are you anxious about your post?"

Kit was rather anxious, but he laughed. "I hope Wheeler may have some use for me, but if he has not, I can take the road and play the fiddle. You, however, have got a pretty house, and if the company sent Bob back to the workshops you would be forced to quit."

"Bob believes Wheeler has some use for you. If he went to the workshops for the winter, I would be resigned. The trouble is, he thinks to help finish the bridge would lead to his promotion, and he's very keen. Sometimes I cannot persuade him I'm satisfied with a little house and cheap furniture."

"Your husband's a first-class engineer and ought to go ahead."

"For all that, he carries an awkward load. His

pluck is fine, but he was very ill in France, and he cannot stand for much wet and cold. On the plains in winter the cold is fierce."

Kit pictured Austin's shivering by the stove, and thought Mrs. Austin's doubts justified; but since he did not know if Bob had talked about it, he must not.

"After all, our job at the bridge is softer than the workmen's, and if Bob is cautious——"

"It looks as if you did not know Bob; but I think you are his friend, and perhaps you can induce him not to be rash. Then you can see he puts on dry clothes and gets proper food. You can keep the stove going, and so forth——"

Kit imagined it was not all Mrs. Austin wanted. The important thing was, she acknowledged him her husband's friend.

"Where it's possible for me to help I promise to do so," he said and Mrs. Austin got up.

"Thank you, Kit. Let's join the others."

Two or three hours afterwards they boiled a kettle and brewed tea. The shadows were longer and half the lake was dark, but the sunshine was on the plain. In the distance gray smoke stained the sky, and going black, advanced across the grass. Then metal began to sparkle, and one saw a locomotive, rolling dust and a row of cars. The train dominated the landscape, and Kit thought it half a mile long.

"The new wheat is going East," said Mrs. Austin. "Two thousand tons, I reckon, and to haul a load like that is some exploit. Well, I own when I see the big wheat trains I get a thrill. Before the railroad crossed the plains Manitoba was the halfbreeds'

furs preserve, and when I was a girl and visited at Winnipeg the mills could hardly use the broken farmers' frost-nipped grain. Now the farmers are getting rich, and Manitoba flour goes across the world. Well, my husband's a railroad builder, and I suppose I mustn't boast."

"After all, the farmers grow the wheat," Austin remarked and pulled out his watch. "Kit and I must be at the bridge in the morning, and we ought to shove off."

Harries went for his motorcycle, Florence jumped up, and the big machine rolled noisily away. When the rocking figures vanished behind the bluff Austin laughed and steered his car into the trail.

"Florence's nerve is pretty good, but if Ted drives like that in the sand belt, something's coming to her."

The car started, and Kit, sitting at the back with Alison, was sorry to go. After the turmoil at the bridge, to loaf about the quiet wood and talk to Alison was soothing. Now his holiday was almost gone, he felt melancholy, but they were not yet at Fairmead and he began to joke.

The trail was torn by wheels and long grass grew between the ruts. The car rocked and the wheels skidded, but until the track pierced the sand belt they made progress. At an awkward corner Austin stopped, and Kit saw the motorcycle a few yards in front. Harries had pulled off his coat and knelt by the machine. His face was red and his hands were smeared by sooty oil.

Miss Grey sat in the sand. Her eyes sparkled, and dark spots on her clothes indicated engine grease.

"She jumped the track and fired us," Harries shouted. "Something's broke and I guess I'm beat. You're engineers. Come on and help!"

Austin pulled out his watch. "Sorry, Ted, but unless we're at the bridge in the morning the chief will make trouble. Can I loan you some tools?"

"I'd like a big hammer," said Harries meaningly. "Anyhow, be a sport and take Florence along. She reckons she can show me, but she doesn't know the first thing about a wheel."

"I know all Ted knows," Florence rejoined. "If he'd let me help, the engine would start, but he gets mad and throws things about. A man ought to be calm."

"Well, I won't give Ted the hammer, but you had better get on board. You see, our train won't wait."

"Then, start your car. I'm not going!"

"I sure like Florence, but she's blamed obstinate," Harries remarked.

"Jump up, Florence," said Alison. "You can't help and you embarrass Ted."

"Ted ought to be embarrassed," Florence rejoined. "He bothered me to go to the lake, and if he's forced to wheel me he's got to take me home."

Austin started the car and smiled.

"Florence is a sport. All she really wants is to see Ted out. If they don't arrive soon, you must send the garage boys along for them, Carrie."

Although the trail was uneven, he drove faster. The red sunset melted and the plain got blue and dim. Elevator towers began to cut the sky and silver

beams from locomotive lamps pierced the gloom. After a time, the lights got dazzling and bells tolled. One saw rows of houses and dark wheat cars. The automobile bumped across the rail, and Kit's holiday was over.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. AUSTIN MEDDLES

CHAINS rattled, an iron pulley clanked, and Kit went down the ladder. The heavy steel frame tilted, but its end had not yet reached the proper spot, and the men stopped for breath. To leave the mass suspended for the night was risky, and Kit meant to make all fast before the whistle blew. Jumping from the ladder, he joined the gang.

"Get to it, boys!" he shouted. "Heave and swing her home!"

The men bent their backs, but the pulley wheels did not turn. The gang was beaten, and if the chain stoppers did not engage smoothly, the load might get away and plunge through the lower platforms to the river. Then Kit saw the man in front was Railton, whom he had put off the bridge.

"You can't pull, Steve. We must give you a softer job."

"I reckon I'd pull you off your feet," the other gasped.

"Show me!" said Kit. "Try again, boys. Steve claims he can boost her. Stay with it; that's great! She's going!"

The frame went, the stoppers held, and a man

carrying the fastening bolts climbed the ladder. Railton turned and rubbed his sweating face with a greasy rag.

"Looks as if I could pull some! Where's your soft job?"

"To get mad is foolish, Steve," Kit remarked with a grin. "When a soft job is going I won't forget you."

He went up the ladder and stopped at a high platform. The plain was gray and the trees along the bank were bare. The river was dark and black ice covered the slacks. Thin floes drifted down the open channel and broke against the bridge piers. The noise they made was monotonous and like the hum of a small circular saw. All was bleak, the light was going, and the wind was cold. In a few minutes work would stop, but Kit must see Wheeler, and he crossed the bridge.

The office was very hot and smelt of tobacco and kerosene. Wheeler rested his feet on the wood box, and when Kit came in put up some letters and tilted his chair.

"Well?" he said.

"We have fixed the tie."

"That's good! I want the heavy braces in before she freezes up; when the ice breaks the piers must stand some thrust. The trouble is, we can't get the stuff from the rolling mills. Well, do you like it at the bridge?"

"I don't grumble," Kit replied. "In fact, if you suggested it, I think I'd hold my job."

"You're not a Canadian and the cold is fierce. Unless you wear mittens, you can't handle iron;

anyhow, you can't let go. I've known men frozen by a blizzard a hundred yards from camp."

"Still you mean to carry on."

"I doubt if all we can do will meet the pay-roll, but we can't shut down. We're up against another company, and the railroad engineers want a number of bridges and tanks. They must have quick construction and are trying us out. We'll hold on to a small picked gang and push ahead when work is possible. I don't know if I will be around much, and the man who takes charge must be hard."

Kit's heart beat. "If you think I could fill the post, I'll risk the cold."

"Nothing's fixed, but I reckon you might take two days off and buy winter clothes at Winnipeg," said Wheeler, smiling. "You'll want the clothes, any way."

"But suppose you kept me, what about Austin?"

Wheeler's look got aggressive and he pushed forward his firm jaw.

"Where Austin goes is the company's business. Bob's a useful man, and if we move him, I reckon he'll be all right, but it hasn't much to do with you, and you can pull out."

Kit went. One did not dispute with Wheeler, and his stating that Austin would be all right was important, since it indicated that he wanted to satisfy Kit. As a rule, Wheeler was not apologetic.

When Austin came in for supper Kit narrated his interview, and noting the other's thoughtful look, remarked with a touch of embarrassment: "If I thought my staying might be awkward for you, I'd give up the idea."

"For you to refuse would be ridiculous," Austin rejoined. "I must go where the bosses send me, and when they push ahead in spring I'd, no doubt, get back. Then the winter's fierce, and I expect Carrie would like it better at an Eastern town. Well, the thing's not fixed."

He resumed his supper, and when the meal was over Kit pulled his chair to the stove. He had agreed he would not for a stipulated time write to Evelyn, but he wanted Mrs. Haigh to know his luck was turning, and he hoped she would give Evelyn the short note he enclosed. Then he wrote to Alan Carson. He knew Alan was interested, and believed he would inform Evelyn about his progress. Kit was young and hopeful, and he rather let himself go.

In the morning the light frost broke, and it looked as if Indian summer had returned. The sky was blue and calm, and pale sunshine touched the plain. Nobody, however, was cheated, and when dusk fell the blast-lamps' white fires tossed along the bridge. Winter was coming, and the piers must be braced and the girders stiffened before the arctic frost began.

For a time Kit did not see Austin much. As a rule, when one was at the bridge the other slept, and when they met for meals they were tired and did not talk. Some material, however, did not arrive, and one morning Austin said:

"Wheeler must slack up for a day or two, and I'm going to Fairmead for a week-end. Carrie hopes you'll come along."

Kit hesitated. He had made two or three happy visits to Fairmead, and he thought he ought not to

bother Mrs. Austin. When he indicated something like that, Austin smiled.

"You're modest, Kit! Carrie ordered me to bring you."

Wheeler was willing for them to go, and at the week-end they went down the line. They got to Fairmead in the evening, and at supper Kit thought Mrs. Austin preoccupied. When they got up she said to Austin:

"Ought you not to see Phelps, Bob?"

"Why, yes," said Austin. "I expect he's shut down at the office. By and by I'll go along to his hotel."

"Since he gets supper at the hotel you had better go now. If you wait, I expect he'll be at the pool room and you can't talk."

"It is possible," Austin agreed and turned to Kit. "Will you take a walk up town?"

Kit thought Mrs. Austin did not want him to go and he waited.

"I'd sooner Kit stayed," she said. "Alison and Florence are coming over. Don't be long, Bob!"

Bob went off and Mrs. Austin took Kit to another room and gave him a cigarette, but for a few minutes she said nothing and Kit looked about. Although the furniture was cheap, the small room was pretty and homelike. The electrolier was shaded and the light was soft. Kit heard the wind in the basement stove under the thin boards and the dry warmth was soothing. A willow tapped the window, and he saw frost on the glass. Then he glanced at his hostess. Carrie Austin was young and attractive, but now her look was firm.

"Perhaps you know why I sent Bob off?" she said.

"I imagined you had an object," Kit admitted.

"Well, perhaps you have heard he goes back to the drawing office at the bridge works for the winter?"

"He said nothing about it. If it implies your giving up your house, I'm sorry."

"To give up the house would not disturb me much. Has Wheeler not told you he means you to carry on?"

"Although I thought nothing was fixed, I expected to stay," said Kit. "In fact, I was rather bucked about it, and I hoped for your congratulations."

Mrs. Austin gave him a queer look. "Then you must think me very generous! Bob's my husband."

Kit began to see a light. He, however, waited and Mrs. Austin resumed:

"You admit that but for Bob you might not have been promoted?"

"Certainly. He persuaded Wheeler to move me from the forge."

"Yet you are willing to take the job he ought to get!"

"Not at all," said Kit. "I really don't think my habit is to let down my friends."

Mrs. Austin said nothing. Kit's smile was apologetic, but his face was red. To doubt his sincerity was impossible. She had not really doubted: she had rather been forced to experiment.

"When Wheeler talked about my carrying on, I inquired if that implied that he would not want

Bob," Kit resumed. "Wheeler declared the company had plans for him and he would not grumble. Then he ordered me off. It looks as if you thought the fellow cheated."

"Bob is keen to get ahead. If he finishes the bridge, he hopes it will help him go farther. But I stated something like this before, and you, of course, could use my argument——"

"I don't want to use your argument, ma'am; your husband's my pal. Since I expect you'd sooner not talk about the thing again, let's try to understand each other. Please go on."

"Very well. Bob has made some inquiries, and all they want at the office is a second-class draftsman. You know Bob was very ill in France, and I'd sooner he went to the office. The trouble is, he's convinced he can stand the cold, and for my sake he hates to let go the chance he thinks he's got."

"It's obvious," said Kit. "Wheeler's an unscrupulous brute; but I don't know why he fixed on me."

"Bob declares you have talent. Then is not your uncle a famous engineer?"

"The house is an English house, and although Jasper Carson sometimes speculates in Canada, he has nothing to do with the bridge. When I admitted he was my uncle, Wheeler seemed to think it a joke. So far, I don't see the joke——"

He stopped and smiled, a crooked smile, for he had boasted to Mrs. Haigh and Alan about his progress, and had seen himself conquering. All the same, he must not force Bob to pay for his triumph. In fact, he must not be a shabby hound.

"You mustn't bother," he went on. "I expect

the idea was Wheeler's, and the head bosses would not approve his giving me control. Anyhow, I'll refuse, and I rather think Wheeler's going to get a jolt."

Mrs. Austin got up and put her hand impulsively on his arm.

"You are fine, Kit, and I'm horribly selfish! I felt I must fight for my husband, but I'd hate you to think he agreed."

"Now you're ridiculous! I can't picture Bob's agreeing, and when you hustled him off he was puzzled."

"There's another thing," said Mrs. Austin. "Had you and Bob competed evenly for the post I should not have meddled. But it was not like that. You were his helper and the post was really his"—she pressed Kit's arm and gave him an apologetic glance—"you see it, don't you, Kit?"

Kit saw something else. The door was open and Alison came in.

"Florence is sorry she cannot get away——" she said and stopped.

Kit was very quiet. Mrs. Austin's hand was on his arm and he wanted to step back, but she did not move and he knew he must not. Alison studied him rather scornfully and the blood came to her skin. Then Mrs. Austin laughed.

"You mustn't be romantic, my dear! But, if you are romantic, whom do you blame?"

"The door was open," said Alison. "I didn't know——"

Kit's face got red, but Mrs. Austin's eyes twinkled.

"In the circumstances, I suppose you must know;

but Bob must not—I expect you think it plain? Well, although Kit is very noble, he is not my lover; I am content with Bob. Perhaps you will satisfy Alison's curiosity, Kit?"

Kit said nothing. To proclaim his nobility was not an attractive part, and Mrs. Austin went on: "Since Kit is modest, I'll try to enlighten you."

She did so, and when she stopped Alison gave Kit an embarrassed glance. Kit's heart beat, for although she blushed and hesitated, he thought her look was proud.

"You could not take another line," she said. "The post is Austin's."

"Of course," said Kit. "All the same, you mustn't talk to Bob about it. When I get back I'll speak to Wheeler, and in the meantime we have had enough. I have brought my fiddle. Let's try the sonata."

Alison went to the piano and Kit tuned his violin. To play was some relief. His high hopes had vanished, and before long he might be forced to take the road and play for his supper. Then he was bothered by his emotions when Alison came in. For all that, he concentrated on the awkward rhythm, and after a time the music carried him away. When they stopped Mrs. Austin looked up.

"Thank you," she said with a twinkle. "You played up nobly." Then she turned to Alison. "Kit does play up. A hard part doesn't daunt him; but perhaps you know."

CHAPTER XIX

KIT TAKES HIS CUE

WHEELER put down the Montreal newspaper and knitted his brows. Snow beat the office windows and the lamp burned unsteadily. A savage wind screamed in the trees and the river brawled. Winter ought to have begun, and Wheeler had expected keen frost to follow the snow, but all the snow that fell melted, and when it went cold rain swelled the pools along the muddy track.

Had the frost arrived, Wheeler would have sent off most of the men and cut expenses by keeping only the limited number he could usefully employ. Now, however, he must carry on as long and fast as possible. The drawback was, he might not finish all he began, and when the spring floods hurled the ice floes against the piers, girders and columns must be firmly stayed. A Canadian river's breaking is an impressive spectacle.

In the meantime, frost and thaw and rain embarrassed the gangs. The boys did not earn their pay, and at the head office construction costs were keenly scrutinized. Then, as soon as the real frost did begin, the company would call Wheeler East and he must fix on the proper man to superintend the cut-

down gang. Austin was a good engineer, but sometimes he got sick, and he could not handle the boys like young Carson. Austin's soberness was not altogether an advantage; when the gang was tired and sullen, Carson's humorous banter went farther than a command. . . . Wheeler turned his head, for the door rattled and Kit came in.

Kit's long boots were muddy and wet snow stuck to his slickers. He shook the melting slush from his hat, and when he faced Wheeler his look was grim. Wheeler thought the boy was riled.

"Hello!" he said. "Is somebody making trouble?"

"The boys are not," said Kit. "Have you decided who's to stay at the bridge?"

"You're pretty frank," Wheeler remarked. "If you like, you can have the job."

"Then, I suppose you're sending Austin to the workshops?"

"Where the company sends Austin has nothing to do with you."

"You stated something like that before. Well, all I'm entitled to say is, if Austin goes, I won't stay."

Wheeler smiled, a rather grim smile. He began to see a light, and he admitted the boy had grit.

"You reckon, unless you see us out, we can't put the bridge across?"

"I'm not a fool," said Kit. "Engineers are pretty numerous. All the same, there's something you ought to weigh: for a time the job would bother a fresh man."

"It's possible," Wheeler agreed. "I begin to get your argument, but go ahead——"

Kit's eyes twinkled. In a way, his talking to Wheeler was humorous. The fellow was his commanding officer and his rule was firm. Kit had thought to annoy him, but so far as he could see, Wheeler was not annoyed. Well, if he wanted to argue, Kit was willing.

"Austin knows his job, and I am, so to speak, his understudy. Then it's important that the boys know us. I expect you have got a pick on Austin and thought you'd ship him off and give me his part. The plan won't work."

"Now I get you; but you can't bluff a big Canadian company. You claim, unless we hold on to Austin, you will let us down? We'll risk it. When do you pull out?"

Kit had thought to conquer; but perhaps in a sense, he had conquered, since Wheeler could not use him.

"I imagine I'm engaged for a month——"

Wheeler laughed and indicated a chair. "If you're resolved, we won't hold you longer than you want; but suppose you let me talk? To begin with, I have not a pick on Austin. Bob's a useful man, but I don't know if he's the proper man to stay at the bridge. If you quit, you'll get your pay up to date, but you want to consider. In winter, Canada's a pretty hard country. You'd find the labor agents have no use for a tenderfoot, and the cheap boarding-houses are crowded by broken roustabouts, waiting for the spring. Since the war I reckon the dollar hotels have shut down. However, if your wad is big——"

"My wad is not big. For all that, I'm not going to take Austin's post."

"Very well! You claimed you were not a fool. Suppose I send you East? If the company tried you out at the office, would it meet the bill?"

"I'd be glad to go," said Kit. "Since I meant to bluff you, you're generous."

"Then, it's fixed, but until the frost stops us, we want you at the bridge. I guess that's all, and you won't talk to Austin about it."

Kit went off. He had not helped Austin, but he had done all he promised to do, and to know he would pay for his meddling was some relief. Since he could not bluff Wheeler, there was no use in hurting himself.

For a week, rain and snow embarrassed the workmen. Sometimes in the morning the mud about the camp was frozen and hoar frost sparkled on the trees, but in a few hours the rain began. The swollen river undermined the bank, and the material stacked along the track sank in the mire. To handle the wet and greasy steel was awkward, but arctic winter would soon arrive, and the work was stubbornly pushed on.

Then a telegram called Wheeler to the company's office and the strain got worse, for the gangs did not stop at night, and somebody besides the foremen must be about. Kit thought the extra effort bothered Austin, and when he returned one stormy evening to the shack he found Bob by the stove. His face was pinched and he was wrapped in a blanket.

"I was forced to stop, but I'm getting warm," he said in an apologetic voice. "If you think all's pretty

straight, I'll go to bed after supper. A good sleep will fix me up."

Kit said he did not expect trouble, and for an hour or two he meant to loaf. To pull off his muddy boots and wet slickers was some relief, and after supper he carried his chair to the stove and lighted his pipe. Austin, sitting opposite rested his feet on a box. His pose was slack, and sometimes he shivered.

"After all, I don't think you ought to complain about the company's sending you off," Kit remarked.

"I don't know that I do complain," Austin rejoined. "If I was often bothered like this, I'd be resigned to quit, but I'm persuaded the trouble's going. One can stand for keen frost—to wear wet clothes, to jump up as soon as you get to sleep and tumble about in the rain and dark is another proposition. To-night my back hurts and I'm dull and cold, but I expect to be all right in the morning."

Kit doubted, but he said: "Mrs. Austin would sooner you were at the drawing office."

"Carrie's glad," Austin agreed. "Still at Toronto she was rather important, and she ought to have cultivated friends. She likes music and pictures and so forth, but so long as my pay is small she must go without. I had hoped to get ahead and give her a better time. To be beaten by a weak body is riling."

"Philosophy's the proper plan; but perhaps you ought to go to bed."

"I'll go soon. Now I've got myself fixed right and my back is easier, I don't want to move."

Kit said nothing. Snow beat the windows and the iron roof rattled; he was tired and frankly did

not want to face the storm. The stove-front got red and the heat was soothing. For an hour he resolved to let himself go slack.

By and by a foreman pushed back the door. He breathed fast, and his look was grim.

"We have got the brace across at the end pier, but the ends won't meet the bolt holes in the lugs."

Austin threw off the blanket and jumped up.

"Are the ends much short?"

"Maybe an inch, but we can't spring the frames. I've sent for jacks and the chain tackle. Looks as if the outside lug wasn't plumb in line——"

"Get to it," said Austin. "I'll be along in a few minutes."

The other went off, and Kit was sorry Wheeler was not about. He thought a screw pile carrying a column had sunk. The brace the men tried to fix would support the column, but the bolts must reach the holes. A bridge is not geometrically accurate and one must sometimes *spring* a member to its place. In a snowstorm, however, to force the stiff frames to meet would be hard.

"Stop by the stove," he said. "As soon as I think we win out, I'll send you word."

"I'm going," Austin rejoined. "When Wheeler's not around I'm in control. Besides, if I go sick when I'm wanted, the company would be entitled to keep me at the office. I can't risk it."

They disputed, but Austin was firm and Kit helped him pull on his thick clothes. When he picked up Austin's slicker he saw the back was torn.

"A bolt end," said Austin. "I helped the boys throw some heavy stuff from a trolley."

"Take my coat," said Kit, and when he put on Austin's he turned his head and smiled.

In a way, Bob's obstinacy was justified, for the man who makes good is the man who is where he is wanted; but Kit began to see a plan. He had stated that he was Austin's understudy, and the torn slicker was his cue. The tear was conspicuous and was made when the men were about. Now, however, Kit had got the coat, the night was dark, and the snow was thick. If Austin were knocked out, Kit thought he could play his part.

"You're stubborn, Bob, but let's get off," he said.

CHAPTER XX

AUSTIN'S UNDERSTUDY

SNOW blew about the bridge and the savage wind screamed in the lattice. The planks laid across the ties were slippery; the flames from the throbbing blast-lamps slanted, and sometimes all was dark. Then the white fires leaped up and a dazzling illumination touched the netted steel. At awkward spots Kit seized Austin's arm. Bob was not steady, the planks were narrow, and if one went across the edge one would plunge to the river.

For a few moments the wind dropped, and the reflections flickered across the shore end of the bridge. The steep bank was faced by stone, and broken rock was stacked along the line. To grade the approach to the bridge was the railroad company's business, but Kit supposed he could use their material.

"I think we'll dump some rock about the shaky pile," he said.

Austin's brain was dull and to keep his feet was hard, but he nodded.

"Very well. Send a gang along."

"You are chief. The order ought to come from you," Kit remarked.

A few minutes afterwards they met the foreman.

"We're surely up against it," said the man. "The outside column's sagging. If we could bolt up the truss, we might hold her, but the straps won't come across."

"Turn out a fresh gang," Austin ordered. "Load up rock and run the trolleys across the bridge. Then rig a derrick and dump the stuff."

"A great notion!" said the foreman. "I'll get busy."

He vanished in the snow, and Austin leaned against the lattice.

"I'm rattled, Kit, but I think you've got it. If the pile sinks, the lot will go. . . . But what about dumping some bags of cement?"

"Wheeler's construction boss, and we don't know what he'd do," Kit replied. "To move the cement might bother him, but, if he wanted, he could dredge up the broken rock. You, however, ought to be in bed."

"If I'd gone to bed, I'd acknowledge I ought not to hold my post. I've got to stay with it."

"Oh, well, your cap will blow off," said Kit, and pulling down the oilskin cap, he firmly tied the strings.

At the end of the bridge they stopped. The beam from the lamps did not travel far, and in front was a dark gap. Twenty feet below, the river brawled among the piers and its turmoil faintly pierced the scream of the gale. A ladder went down into the tossing snow, and one heard chains rattle and hoarse shouts. Then a slanted flame leaped upright, and platforms and workmen's figures got distinct. Kit

thought Austin ought not to go down, but Bob was obstinate and he could not force him back.

He went in front, and where it was possible, steadied the other. By and by he pulled Austin on to a platform, and bracing himself against the gale, he looked about. The snow blew obliquely across the bridge and the light was puzzling. Sometimes shining columns and skeleton trusses cut the hazy background; sometimes the flames sank and the netted steel melted in the gloom.

Men, balanced awkwardly on narrow bars, steadied a big steel frame suspended by wire tackles. Another group hauled on a chain and when they reached for a fresh hold the platform rocked. Two or three more, on the beams overhead, turned a screw. The suspended frame did not altogether span the gap and reach the fastenings on the pillar. To pull the mass into line looked impossible, but one must try, and the screws and multiplying tackle were powerful. Kit touched Austin.

"I think she'll come across, and if we can get the bolts through the bottom lugs, we ought to fix the top. Anyhow, I'll go up. Keep the boys to it."

He had got Austin's coat and, in the snow and turmoil, he thought the men would not know him from Bob; they were much the same height and build. Jumping for a tie-rod, he went up into the snow, and when a beam from a lamp searched the spot he reached, the torn slicker was conspicuous. Underneath were two small platforms and the angry flood. His hands were numb and his skin smarted, but after all the snow was wet. Flesh and blood could not labor in the frost that dries the snow to dust.

He shouted. A straining wire rope groaned and the bottom of the truss jarred the column. Kit took a bolt from a workman and went down an inclined rod. A man on the opposite column waved his arms, as if to indicate that the end was fast, and Kit guided the bored steel strap to the proper spot. The end moved very slowly, but it did move; the holes were almost opposite, and although the heavy frame oscillated in the wind, he thought in a few moments he would push in the bolt. Then a noise disturbed him and he saw Austin was coming up.

Kit frowned. Bob ought not to risk the climb; but he must concentrate on guiding the strap to the socket and he could hardly use his stiff hands. He pushed the bolt through the holes and straightened his back. The job was not finished, but the worst strain was over. They had put the truss where it ought to go and the bolts would hold until all was fast.

Then Kit remembered Austin. Bob had stopped, as if he saw he was not needed. He turned and pushed his hand along a bar, and Kit thought he meant to go down. A foreman shouted, and the wire tackles running from the girder overhead went slack. A big iron pulley dropped a foot or two and the hook it carried disengaged. Kit doubted if the hook struck Austin, but it looked as if he heard the noise and tried to avoid the shock. His boots rattled on the iron and his shoulders went back. Kit saw he was letting go, and he swung himself down to a fresh support and put his arm round the other.

"Stick tight!" he said. "I'll help you to the ladder."

They reached the ladder, but the effort cost Kit much, and when he saw Austin take hold he stopped to get his breath.

"If you can reach the platform, we'll send you up in the skip," he gasped.

"I think I can make it," said Austin, and they went down.

At the platform Kit pushed Austin to a tool-box. Snow blew about, the lamp's flame tossed and all was indistinct. The current broke noisily against the piers and the wind screamed in the bridge. When a foreman advanced Kit bent his head.

"The boys have rigged the derrick. Shall we start in to dump the rock?"

Kit nodded, and when the man vanished, touched Austin.

"Don't talk, Bob. Let me handle things. We'll soon have all fixed."

"I don't want to talk," said Austin. "I want to lie down."

Kit waited with some anxiety. Bob was obviously ill, but the men must not know, and Kit hoped the skip would soon arrive. By and by a big steel bucket swung across the platform and a load of broken rock splashed in the river. Austin got into the skip awkwardly, for Kit dared not help, but when he jumped on the edge and seized the chain, he called the foreman.

"Keep going! I'll be back as soon as possible."

The bucket went up and stopped at the plankway along the bridge. Kit saw the gang was occupied, and putting his arm round Austin, steered him to an unloaded trolley. Austin leaned against him and

Kit imagined he did not know where they went. When they got on board he shouted for two or three men.

"My office! Shove her along!"

The trolley rolled ahead and the tossing fires melted in the snow. The trees along the track bent in the wind and the noise was like the roar of the sea. One could not see four yards in front; but at length a faint glimmer pierced the snow and the trolley stopped. Austin got down, Kit signalled the others to go back, and when the trolley vanished guided Austin to the door. When they got inside, Austin dropped into a chair. His eyes were half shut, he shivered and his face was gray.

"I expect the pulley hit me, although I didn't feel the knock," he said. "However, I ought not to quit——"

"Since all was straight before you went you needn't bother," Kit replied in a cheerful voice. "But put your feet on the box, I'm going to pull off your boots."

Austin gave him a dull, puzzled look.

"You were on the tie-rod? I've a notion I came near to letting go; but I don't remember much——"

"Oh, well," said Kit, "it doesn't matter, and the boys want me. I'll help you to bed."

He pulled off Austin's clothes and put him in his bunk. Austin said nothing and after a few minutes Kit thought him asleep. He dared not stop, and throwing Austin's torn slicker under some clothes, he got his own coat and faced the gale.

Some time after daybreak he started for the office. He was exhausted and the morning was very cold.

The wind had dropped, the sky was clear, and the snow on the planks was hard. Shining icicles hung from the ironwork and Kit concluded winter had at length arrived. At the bridge-head a man stopped him.

"Did the pulley hit you, Mr. Carson? I reckoned she was going to knock you off the frame."

"I got two or three knocks," Kit replied with a laugh. "On the whole, I imagine cooking's a softer job than running a bridge gang."

He stopped for a few minutes at the bunkhouse, and then went to the office. Austin had got up and some color had come back to his skin. Kit pulled off his long boots and lighted a cigarette. The stove was red hot, and after the cold and strain he was willing to relax.

"How are you, Bob?" he asked.

Austin said he was shaky, but he expected soon to be better and he must try to get about. Kit agreed. If it were but for an hour or two, Bob ought to superintend.

"Jock will send us breakfast in a few minutes," he said. "When you have got some food you might take a walk along the girder. Put on your big coat and skin-cap. The cold is fierce."

"Your plan's rather obvious, Kit. However, I expect I must play up; people indulge you. I don't know another man who could persuade a camp cook to serve breakfast when it was not the proper time."

"Well, you see, I was Jock's piper. Besides, you're not forced to advertise that you're not very fit. When you were wanted, you were on the spot."

"I doubt if I helped much," said Austin in a

thoughtful voice. "When the boys let go the tackle, you jumped across and helped me down—did you not? Perhaps it's strange, but I don't remember all we did."

"It isn't strange," said Kit. "The wind was savage and the snow was thick. We were highly strung and I suppose we worked mechanically. All we knew was, we must get the truss across. Well, before you went the truss was in place."

"When did I go?"

"Now I'm beaten! When I stopped I felt as if I'd fought the gale for a week. Anyhow, it was some time in the morning and the worst strain was over. I expect you saw we didn't need you and you went slack."

"You are a good pal," Austin remarked in a meaning voice. "Well, I wonder——"

Kit frowned. He thought he had cheated the workmen, but unless he cheated Austin he had not gained much. Bob would not allow himself to be rewarded for another's efforts. Moreover, he was not a fool and Kit was tired.

"Sometimes you're horribly obstinate, but if you're not satisfied, you must talk to the boys. They saw you about and they'll admit they took your orders. If you study the job, I expect you'll see the orders were good."

Austin's look was thoughtful, but Kit imagined he was to some extent convinced, and soon afterwards the cook carried in their breakfast.

After a few days Wheeler arrived and approved all the others had done. When he had examined their work he called Kit to his office.

"You'll be glad to hear we have arranged for Austin to take control?"

"I think you have got the proper man, but when we talked about it you did not agree."

Wheeler shrugged. "My word goes, but I'm not head boss. At all events, you didn't put across your bluff and have got to quit! Now the frost's begun, we'll break the gangs and you can pull out for the workshops."

"So long as you have given me another post I mustn't grumble," Kit remarked with a smile. "In fact, on the whole, I think my luck is pretty good. To bluff a big construction company is rash."

Wheeler gave him a queer look. "Well, I don't know if you'd hesitate about bluffing a construction gang! All the same, if you stay with it at the shops, I'll send for you when we start up in spring. Now you had better pack your trunk. A train goes down the line in the afternoon."

Kit packed his trunk, and at dusk a locomotive and a row of flat cars rolled across the old wooden bridge. The cook and a foreman put Kit's trunk in the calaboose, and for a few minutes he talked to Austin and looked about.

The snowy woods shone in the sunset and the broad white plain melted in ethereal blue; by contrast, the open channel of the river was black like ink. Two or three faint plumes of smoke went straight up, and along the bridge a few hammers beat. That was all and Kit felt the camp was strangely quiet. Winter had arrived. Then somebody signalled and Austin gave Kit his hand.

"Good luck!" he said. "Stay with it, partner.

I think Wheeler bets on you; he'll see you get your chance."

Kit jumped for the step, the bell clanged, and the train steamed away into the gloom. When a brakesman pulled the door across, Kit sat down and lighted his pipe. Bob had kept his post and that was something, but he had given up his and for four or five months his work would be monotonous and unimportant. He had seen himself triumphant at the bridge; to copy plans at the drawing office was another thing. Although he felt he had taken the proper line, he wondered whether Evelyn would approve. Mrs. Haigh certainly would not.

CHAPTER XXI

JASPER EXPERIMENTS

DINNER was over at Netherhall, and Mrs. Carson's party had gone to the drawing-room. Mrs. Carson was conservative and she refused to banish the early-Victorian walnut furniture. She claimed Gibbons carved the noble fireplace, but the plate glass carried across above the big grate did not altogether stop the smoke. Tall brass pillars supported oil lamps; the piano and card-table were lighted by candles in old silver sticks.

Although the furniture was ugly, the spacious room had dignity and Mrs. Carson harmonized. Her mouth was thin and her face was pinched. Sometimes her look was mean, she was frankly parsimonious, and her clothes were not good, but her stamp was the stamp of the proud old school.

For Netherhall, the party was large. Jasper had arrived from Liverpool; he had rooms at Sheffield and London, but his habit was to stop for a day or two with his brother. Agatha had arrived from the hospital, and Ledward from town. When he was bored he visited at Netherhall. Ledward was Mrs. Carson's favorite and he cleverly cultivated her. Mrs. Carson knew her nephew, but she was flattered.

Mrs. Haigh and Evelyn were her friends, and as a rule they came across when she had other guests.

"You were at Liverpool?" she said to Jasper.

"I was sending off a man to Montreal. I myself ought to have gone, but when the St. Lawrence freezes one must go by Halifax or New York, and now I get old I begin to hate the shaking cars."

Smoke whirled about the glass shield, rain beat the windows, and the trees by the river roared like the sea.

"I should hate the steamer," Mrs. Carson remarked. "So long as another was willing to go for me, I would be content."

"The trouble is, I'm forced to be content. Ambitious young men, keen to undertake my job, are numerous, but I doubt their talent, and since I have not an engineer relation I must hold out as long as possible."

"We thought Kit might have helped," Alan Carson remarked.

"Kit had other plans," said Jasper dryly and turned to Agatha. "You are an independent lot. When I could have got you an easier post you stuck to your hospital."

"At the hospital I have some authority, and one likes to command," said Agatha, smiling. "Independence is attractive."

"Sometimes it's expensive. I suppose you get news from your brother?"

"Kit has not written to me for some time. All I know is he was engaged at a Manitoba bridge."

"We got two letters," said Mrs. Haigh. "The first was optimistic; Kit was to stay at the bridge for

the winter and superintend. The other was rather apologetic. He had given up his post and was going to the company's workshops."

"He stated he had *resigned* his post?"

"The engineer at the bridge wanted him to stay. Kit's grounds for refusing were not very clear and his note was short."

"Kit's habit is to resign his posts. To know he was not forced to do so is some comfort," Mrs. Carson remarked.

"He was certainly not forced," said Evelyn, with an angry blush. "We don't know why he went, but his object was good."

Jasper gave her a queer, fixed look and then studied Mrs. Haigh. She obviously agreed with Evelyn, but he thought Kit's not remaining at the bridge had annoyed her. In fact, since he imagined she did not like to own Kit had omitted to seize his opportunity, her frankness was perhaps strange. Mrs. Haigh, however, knew where frankness paid.

"Do you know who are his employers?" he inquired.

Mrs. Haigh stated the company's title, and Alan looked up with surprise. Jasper smiled ironically.

"I was willing to go without my nephew's help, but I didn't reckon on his joining my antagonists," he said and turned to Mrs. Carson. "The company is the competitor of a Canadian house in which I'm interested. Just now, a railroad weighs its tenders for some important contracts against ours."

"You don't imply that Kit knew?" Evelyn rejoined.

"It's possible he did not. For all that, I imagine

the bridge company knew whom they employed. When one engages an engineer one makes inquiries, and a number of people know I support the opposition."

"I don't see the others' object," said Alan in a disturbed voice.

"It looks like a joke, but Canadian engineers are not remarkably humorous. Then, although I expect they found out about Kit's leaving the shipyard, they risked engaging him."

"Kit was not bound to enlighten the people," Mrs. Haigh remarked.

"Something depends upon one's point of view," Jasper replied, and turned to Agatha. "What do you think about it?"

"When Kit was engaged his employers knew all that weighed against him."

"If they found out he was your nephew, they perhaps hoped they might use him," said Mrs. Carson.

Agatha looked up, but she saw Evelyn's eyes sparkle and she waited.

"Then they were very foolish; Kit would not take a bribe to be shabby," Evelyn declared, and Jasper gave her an indulgent smile.

"On the whole, I agree. There's another thing; Canadians are not fools, and if they studied Kit for a very short time, they'd be satisfied he had not much talent for intrigue. Well, I think we'll let it go."

Mrs. Carson beckoned her husband, and Mrs. Haigh and Jasper went with them to the card-table, but Agatha stopped in the corner by the fireplace. She had studied the others and now she pondered.

Mrs. Carson was frankly spiteful; she, no doubt, felt Kit had humiliated his relations and ought to be punished. Alan was Kit's friend, but he dared not oppose his wife, and Agatha thought Jasper's remark about the Carsons' independence carried a sneer. Since Evelyn was not plucky, her championing Kit was curious; Agatha wondered whether she had reckoned on her mother's support. Yet, as a rule, Mrs. Haigh played up to Mrs. Carson. Moreover, she was something of an adventuress and Kit was poor and, so to speak, in disgrace. Agatha admitted she did not see much light.

Ledward had said nothing, but the ground was awkward, and his habit was to be tactful. Although Agatha thought Evelyn attracted him, Ledward was not the man to marry a poor wife. Agatha did not see him carried away by romantic passion. Harry was clever and had made his mark at Oxford, but, although he was not rich, he was apparently satisfied to do nothing. Now he talked to Evelyn and Evelyn smiled.

Jasper excited Agatha's curiosity. She imagined he had studied the group with a sort of ironical humor, and when he talked about Kit she got a hint of antagonism. She thought it strange, because the old fellow was rather inscrutable; and if he were antagonistic, she fancied he would not be willing for the others to know. Well, there was not much use in speculating, and she joined Evelyn.

When Agatha sat down Ledward went off. For a young man he was rather fat; but he was a handsome fellow and marked by a cultivated urbanity. Agatha let him go and turned to Evelyn.

"You're loyal," she said. "I thought you plucky!"

"Kit's my lover. I promised to marry him when he makes good."

"Then the stipulation was not, *if he made good?*"

"Sometimes you're like Jasper Carson; one doubts if you are kind."

"I'm Kit's sister; perhaps I'm shabbily jealous," Agatha replied.

"Oh, well, I'm going to be frank. Mrs. Carson hates Kit and mother's afraid of her; she punishes people who do not agree. I really think I was noble, because when we got Kit's last letter I was annoyed. I felt he had thrown away another chance."

Agatha's look got sympathetic. "Since to go cost him something, I expect he went because he was convinced he ought to go."

"It's possible," Evelyn agreed in a moody voice. "Kit's romantic and sometimes I'd sooner he was selfish. We don't yet altogether know why he gave up his post at the shipyard; but, if he had thought only for himself, he need not have done so. Now I wonder whether he has not again allowed his rash generosity to carry him away."

Agatha had speculated about something like that. Evelyn knew her lover, but it looked as if she did not approve. In the circumstances, for her to do so would perhaps be hard.

"Sometimes I feel Kit does not think of me," Evelyn resumed, and although she blushed her look was calculating. "We are poor and I hate poverty. The proper plan was to make a good marriage. Yet I stuck to Kit. To talk about it jars, but I'm human and I'm bothered. For one thing, mother indulged

me although she knew I was foolish, and I'd hate to feel Kit had disappointed her.

"Kit does not disappoint his friends," Agatha remarked in a quiet voice.

"But he ought to be ambitious. One must not be generous where another is forced to pay. Kit does not weigh things; I expect he's plunged into a fresh entanglement, but he ought not to be rash. You see, I must stop at dreary Netherdale. Then people know Kit's poverty, and when they pretend to sympathize I feel they sneer. Mrs. Carson's remarks hurt worse because she was persuaded they were justified. There's the trouble—it looks as if the people who doubted Kit were justified——"

Agatha was disturbed. Evelyn's loyalty cost her something and might yet cost her much. So far she had paid, but Agatha wondered whether she could keep it up. Evelyn was selfish and rather shabbily ambitious. All the same, one must acknowledge her part was hard.

"You must not exaggerate, my dear," she said. "Kit has talent, and he'll soon make progress."

After a time the card party broke up. Alan Carson and Ledward went to the billiard-room and Agatha went for a book. When she came back she saw Jasper in the hall and she stopped.

"It looked as if Miss Haigh gave you her confidence," he said.

"Evelyn was angry. Aunt was not kind."

"So far as she sees, my sister-in-law is sincere. Do you imply that her unkindness was all that bothered Miss Haigh?"

"You implied that our talk was confidential,"

Agatha rejoined. "In a way, I'm sorry for Evelyn. You don't like her?"

"You're blade-straight and keen as steel," said Jasper with a dry smile. "Well, I own I don't like Mrs. Haigh and one inherits much. I'd sooner trust a fool than a calculating woman."

"It doesn't look as if Evelyn calculated. She means to stick to Kit."

"I wonder whether you thought it remarkable," Jasper observed.

Agatha said nothing and he resumed: "Had you chosen a wife for your brother, would you have chosen Miss Haigh?"

"Perhaps I would not. Our business, however, is not to choose Kit's wife, and we ought not to meddle."

"Then Miss Haigh has your support?"

"She has my sympathy," Agatha replied, and Jasper gave her a queer smile and went off.

For a few minutes Agatha stopped by the fire in the hall. On the whole she liked Jasper Carson, but he puzzled, and sometimes daunted her. Now she saw he had tried to find out if she believed Evelyn really meant to stick to her lover, and she thought his interest ominous. When she went back to the drawing-room, Jasper was not about and Mrs. Carson said he and Ledward had gone to smoke.

In the smoking-room Jasper gave Ledward a cigar.

"You ought to have an occupation, Harry. Have you thought about it?"

"I rather thought I might be a barrister, but I

don't know. . . . One must keep twelve terms at an inn; something like three years before one can start."

Jasper nodded. "Then, unless you're lucky and remarkably talented, the reward's not large. What about business?"

"If I sold all I have got, the sum I could invest would not carry me far, and since I'm not much attracted, I'd hesitate to face the risk. Then, if I took a post, I imagine the pay would be small, and so long as I'm not extravagant I can meet my bills."

"You might resolve to marry. When one is married one's bills go up."

"It's possible," Ledward agreed in a careless voice. "So far, I have not thought much about marriage."

"Suppose I offered you a good post?"

"That's another thing. I'd weigh your offer."

"Very well! I'm getting old and begin to feel I need help. Although I can buy help, I want a man I know, whose interests would be mine. At one time I thought I might use Kit, and by and by he might carry on the forge, but I saw the plan would not work."

Ledward thought his luck was good. Jasper was not looking for a clerk; he implied he wanted a man who would take control when he was forced to let things go. In fact, he really wanted something like an heir. Kit was his relation, but he had not taken the proper line and now Jasper hinted that he had done with him. All the same, one must use some caution.

"The difficulty is, I am not an engineer."

"At Oxford you were a mathematician, and I want

help to handle rather complicated finance. If you are willing, I'll try you out."

"I'm keen, sir," Ledward replied.

"Then, I must arrange for you to meet me at my town office. If I am satisfied, you will not grumble about the pay."

"Thank you," said Ledward. "In the meantime, would you sooner I did not talk about it?"

"I think we will not yet announce our agreement," Jasper replied. "For one thing, I don't know if you have the qualities I want; and then you may not like your job."

CHAPTER XXII

MRS. HAIGH REVIEWS HER PLANS

LEDWARD went to the London office and for a time was at the bookkeeper's desk. At the beginning the bookkeeper, who did not need much help, speculated about his employer's object, but he soon admitted that Ledward had qualities he had not thought to find in a fashionable loafer. Jasper Carson, however, did not want a clerk. All he really wanted only he himself knew. In the meantime, he meant Harry to be useful.

Ledward was something of a Hedonist. He took the pleasures he could get without much risk and effort, and when he did make an effort he wanted a reward. He was not remarkably scrupulous, but he observed conventional rules and went soberly because he knew one must pay for indulgence.

For all that, he was interested and Jasper's business transactions fired his imagination. Ledward frankly acknowledged the old fellow's cleverness. Jasper was not as rich as his relations thought; for the most part, he used others' money and all he earned was re-invested in fresh ventures. His finance, however, was sound and honest, and his shares were worth a considerable sum.

Ledward began to think himself fortunate. Engineering was not his line, but he had a talent for calculation. He knew his help was worth something and Jasper had indicated that his reward might be generous. He wanted money; for one thing he wanted to marry Evelyn.

Ledward was not romantic, and he knew Evelyn. Then he knew Mrs. Haigh, and Evelyn was her daughter. In a sense, she was not fastidious, and he knew her shallow; shallow was perhaps the proper word, because her cleverness, so to speak, was surface cleverness and selfish. For all that, she attracted him and he was moved by her beauty. When he could support a wife he meant to marry Evelyn, and her having engaged to marry Kit was not an obstacle. After a time, Jasper one morning came to the office.

"My relations have not heard you have joined me, and since you are going to stay, perhaps they ought to know," he said. "On Wednesday my sister-in-law and her party will arrive. She and Alan go to Hampshire, and Mrs. Haigh visits with some friends in Surrey. They will be in town for a day or two and will dine with me on Wednesday evening. I thought we might announce our agreement. You perhaps are not engaged?"

Ledward said he had not an engagement, and his satisfaction was keen, for he had not known if Jasper wanted him to stay. Sometimes the old fellow indulged his freakish humor, and Ledward knew he studied him. Although he had said nothing about Evelyn, Ledward supposed she would arrive with

Mrs. Haigh. Perhaps Jasper had wanted to see if he would inquire.

"Then we'll fix it," said Jasper, and presently went off.

The dinner was at a famous hotel, and Ledward had thought to get there early and meet Evelyn before his employer was about, but he was occupied by some intricate accounts. Jasper had given him the awkward job, which could not be left for the morning, and when Ledward reached the hotel the party waited in the big glass-roofed court.

Crossing the floor, he gave the others an interested glance. Mrs. Carson's smile was friendly and Mrs. Haigh's polite. Ledward thought she speculated about his being Jasper's guest. Evelyn's look was puzzled, and he doubted if Jasper had told his guests for whom they waited.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I felt I must finish the piece of work, and when I got away the traffic stopped my cab."

Jasper nodded, and Alan Carson laughed.

"For you to be strenuously occupied is something fresh!"

"Harry's business was rather important and I'm accountable for his being late. The work that delayed him was mine," Jasper remarked. "However, I expect our table's ready. Shall we go in?"

The head waiter led them across the polished floor, and when they sat down Jasper engaged the others in careless talk. Ledward said nothing; he felt when Jasper wanted him to speak he would get his cue. The old fellow, so to speak, was a good

stage manager. In the meantime, Harry studied the group.

Jasper was urbanely inscrutable, but one got a sense of command. Alan tried to control his curiosity. Mrs. Carson's clothes were out-of-date, but she and Jasper wore a stamp the others did not. Yet Mrs. Haigh and Evelyn were fashionable and harmonized with the expensively dressed crowd. By and by Mrs. Carson turned to Ledward.

"You are quiet, Harry, and we have not heard from you since you went back to town. Have you begun your studies for the Bar?"

"I have not," said Ledward smiling, and noting Jasper's glance, resumed: "I rather think I have got a better job!"

"Harry tries to flatter me," Jasper remarked. "Not long since I admitted I got old, and now he has agreed to help. I'm glad to acknowledge his help is worth something."

"Then, he's at your office?" said Alan with keen surprise.

"That is so," Jasper agreed, and called a waiter. "By and by I expect he will be my head man, and perhaps for you to wish the combine good luck would not be theatrical."

Ledward thought Jasper theatrical. At all events he had given the announcement a dramatic touch, and Ledward saw he surveyed his guests with dry amusement.

Mrs. Carson's approval was obvious, but it looked as if Alan were annoyed. Evelyn's look got hard, and Mrs. Haigh's face was slightly red. She had got a nasty knock, but she lifted her glass.

"We knew your helper's cleverness, but it seems he has abilities we did not guess," she said in a level voice. "I hope your experiment will go as you expect!"

"Thank you," said Jasper. "One likes one's friends' approval. So far as the experiment has gone I have good grounds to be satisfied."

"You have got the proper man," said Mrs. Carson. "You would not have been satisfied with Kit."

"It's possible," Jasper agreed, and Ledward fancied Mrs. Carson had unconsciously given him his cue. "I had meant the post for Kit. For one thing, he's my relation and an engineer. I thought he might by and by carry on the forge, but I acknowledge I'm sometimes cheated."

He began to talk about something else and Mrs. Haigh supported him, but the effort cost her much, and when the others joined she stopped and mused. The economy she was forced to practice jarred, and Netherdale was a dreary spot; she liked to dine at expensive hotels and mix with fashionable people. The music, the cultivated voices, and the women's jewels excited her, and she had thought, for a day or two, to follow her bent and forget that she was poor.

Mrs. Haigh knew she had social talents, and had she the others' chance, she could make her mark. Poverty was an awkward obstacle, and in order to mend her broken fortunes she had planned to use Evelyn's beauty. Evelyn was young, and it looked as if she were romantic, but Mrs. Haigh knew she had inherited much from her. As a rule, she saw

where her advantage was, and in puzzling circumstances her judgment was unconsciously, and perhaps instinctively, sound. For example, she had refused to let Kit go.

Now, however, Mrs. Haigh felt Kit had let her down. She doubted if Jasper were often cheated, but he had cheated her and calm was hard. All the same, Mrs. Haigh's pluck was good, and she tried to be philosophical. Since the plan from which she had hoped for much would not work, she must make another. She was not yet beaten, and she thought Jasper did not know his antagonist.

After dinner, Jasper and Alan went off for a smoke. When Alan lighted a cigarette he frowned.

"You are a business man and perhaps I ought not to meddle; but do you think you can trust Harry?"

"Ledward is your relation."

"He's my wife's relation," Alan rejoined. "I don't imply that he'd rob you; but, if he's going to be useful, you must give him your confidence. . ."

"To some extent, that is so. Well?"

Alan hesitated. His habit was to hesitate and he said awkwardly: "Where you have keen competitors, your servants must be stanch. If I carried on a business like yours and engaged Harry, I'd use some reserve."

"Oh, well," said Jasper, "I reckon I can trust the fellow as far as I'm forced. . . ." He stopped for a moment and lighted a cigarette, for he wanted to strike a note he had struck before. Alan was dull and would not think his doing so significant.

"Frankness is rather embarrassing," he resumed.

"You see, Kit is my relation, but I don't feel I could reckon on his trustworthiness."

"Kit's straight; we don't know all," said Alan stubbornly. "In fact, I'm convinced he's your proper helper and I thought you agreed."

"You stated something like that before," Jasper remarked, and added with a smile: "Well, it looks as if you, and perhaps others, bet on the wrong man."

Alan frowned, and after a few minutes got up. "My wife and Mrs. Haigh are going to the West End, and I believe Evelyn means to look up a friend. Perhaps I'd better inquire when they want to start."

Soon after Jasper went to the smoking-room Ledward lighted a cigarette in the court. A band played quiet music and people walked about. Nobody came to Ledward's corner and he was content to muse. He saw Jasper had meant the others to know he, so to speak, was the favorite, but the old fellow's object was another thing. Anyhow, Jasper had undertaken to push him ahead, and since his word went, Ledward thought he was entitled to enjoy his satisfaction.

By and by he saw Evelyn on the other side of the court. He thought she looked for somebody, but he did not see the others and he crossed the floor. Evelyn went to a bench under a palm and Ledward sat down.

"I don't think you congratulated me about my good luck," he said.

Evelyn's eyes sparkled. "For you to expect my congratulations was rather remarkable! Although you were Kit's friend, you took his post."

"I sympathize with your annoyance, but you re not just. You see, I took nothing he wanted from Kit. All I got he, in a sense, had already refused. Although he's Jasper's nephew, he made it plain that he would sooner his uncle left him alone."

"Perhaps that is so, Kit is independent," Evelyn admitted.

"Very well! I'm not independent; for one thing I'm not rich and for me to refuse a useful occupation and first-class pay was ridiculous. Since Kit had gone off to Canada and joined his uncle's competitors, I seized the opportunity he rather scornfully neglected."

Evelyn's color got high and her look was hard, but it was not because Ledward offended her. After all, Harry was logical, and Kit was not. He was not rich and he ought to have cultivated his relation, but he indulged his romantic pride. Then, when he began to make progress, he again gave up his post. In fact, Kit did not think for her. Ledward saw her pre-occupation and knew he had struck the proper note.

"We mustn't dispute about it and I like your championing Kit," he resumed.

"Ah," said Evelyn moodily, "perhaps Kit needs a champion!"

Ledward let it go, and for a few minutes they talked about something else. Then Mrs. Haigh and Mrs. Carson arrived.

"We must start, and I rather think you ought to go with us," Mrs. Haigh said to Evelyn.

"Clara expects me, and I can get a cab."

Ledward thought Mrs. Haigh hesitated, and he saw his opportunity.

"If you like and Evelyn agrees, I will take her to Miss Chisholm's."

Mrs. Haigh thanked him and soon afterwards the party went off. Ledward imagined Evelyn had gone for her coat and he waited, but when she rejoined him she wore her evening clothes.

"Mother is rather old-fashioned," she remarked. "Since you offered to see me out, I expect you have not an engagement?"

"I have not," said Ledward. "When you are ready I'll send for a cab."

Evelyn smiled. "If you don't mind, we might stay for a time. I like the music and I like to see the people."

"Then, we'll stay as long as you like. But what about Miss Chisholm? Will she not wait for you?"

"I'm not very keen about seeing Clara. All I wanted was not to be forced to go with mother. Perhaps you know the Lomaxes?"

Ledward said he did not, and Evelyn resumed: "Oh well, they're sober, old-fashioned bores and I imagine Mrs. Carson will stay until midnight and talk about people they knew when she was young. Mother will play up; I rather think she'll like it. But I'd soon be horribly tired."

"Then, let's wait," said Ledward. "The band is pretty good, and you can study the fashions."

Evelyn saw he wanted to wait, but she had reckoned on his agreeing and her annoyance was gone. After all, his apology was logical, and she was willing to use him.

"Perhaps I'm shabby, but I don't mind very much," she said. "Since I'm in town only for a day or two, I want to use every minute. I admit I like hotels and shops and fashionable crowds. All is interesting, and after Netherdale, one needs some stimulation. Then, you see, although Clara's an art student, she's not the modern sort. She paints seriously, and I don't know much about pictures. Now I am in town I want to be excited and to feel I am alive."

On the whole, Ledward thought she did not exaggerate. For a young, ambitious girl Netherdale was dull, and he knew Mrs. Haigh's frugality. He sympathized with Evelyn and thought he could indulge her.

"I've got something like an inspiration," he remarked. "Suppose you cut out your engagement with Miss Chisholm and we go to a theatre? I know a good musical comedy and perhaps the house is not full."

"Oh," said Evelyn, "it would be splendid! The drawback is, I'm afraid mother would not be pleased."

Ledward had remarked Mrs. Haigh's willingness for him to convey Evelyn to her friend's studio. Moreover he thought a hint of intrigue attracted the girl.

"We might look up Miss Chisholm for a few minutes and perhaps take her with us," he suggested carelessly. "Then, if our relations are some time at the Lomaxes and we don't stay for the last act——"

"I ought to refuse," said Evelyn, and then gave

Ledward a smile. "Sometimes one does things one ought not. Let's go!"

She went for her cloak. Ledward went to the telephone and ordered a cab.

CHAPTER XXIII

BLAKE'S CONFESSION

EVELYN went to the musical comedy and the excursion carried a thrill. She was young, and to steal off with Ledward was something of an adventure. Ledward knew Evelyn better than she imagined and he humored her cleverly. Although he declared her going was justified, he contrived to give the excursion a touch of intimate secrecy. Evelyn had inherited some skill for intrigue, and she rather liked to feel she and Harry were conspirators. In fact, she admitted that for all to know she went with him would rob the evening of its charm.

Three or four days afterwards Evelyn and a young relation started for the post-office at a Surrey village. A long row of red-roofed houses began by the railway and stopped at the wide heath; the tarred road and high telegraph posts went on to London. Mrs. Haigh had not gone back to town, and Evelyn began to feel that she was bored. Her hosts were not fashionable, and the people she met did not interest her. Then Hannah Grant was recently from school, and a raw girl's society had not much charm.

By and by a car crossed the heath and stopped by

the post-office. The driver called a telegraph boy and then went slowly up the street as if he looked for a house. After a few moments Evelyn's dulness vanished; the man was Harry Ledward and she knew he looked for Mrs. Grant's. She waved and he stopped by the path.

"The weather's good and when I got to the office Jasper stated I might take a holiday," he said. "I thought I'd look you up and risk your being occupied. What does one do here on a fine afternoon?"

"We play golf," Evelyn replied. "Sometimes we go for a walk."

Ledward smiled and Hannah Grant gave him an approving look.

"Sometimes one gets deadly bored," she remarked. "Well, we can give you tea and polite conversation, but perhaps you'd like a round of golf? My handicap's thirty and Evelyn foozles."

"I've another plan," said Ledward. "I wonder whether you and Evelyn would like to run to town? But perhaps you go often and it does not attract you much?"

"I go when return tickets are cheap," Hannah replied. "If you want to take Evelyn, you must take me. Mother and Mrs. Haigh are very proper, but I don't mind admitting I am not. Besides I'd love to go!"

"Then, jump up. Where's your house?"

"At the end of the row; the pond is in front. Father declares it gives the spot a rural touch and he likes the white ducks. The drawback is the ducks

are not its only occupants. . . . But get in, Evelyn. Your part's to persuade mother."

"To begin with, we must persuade Evelyn," said Ledward and started the car.

Hannah smiled, but she said nothing, and when they stopped at a new rough-cast house Ledward was not forced to use much persuasion.

"I wonder whether you would like to see a play," he said to Mrs. Haigh. "There's a rather good matinee, and I would drive you down in the evening. The car carries four passengers."

Mrs. Haigh and Mrs. Grant refused politely, but they agreed for Evelyn and Hannah to go. The girls went off to get other clothes, and Hannah stopped for a moment at Evelyn's room.

"I like the lean, dark type, and Mr. Ledward's rather fat; otherwise I think him top-hole," she said. "You feel he knows something; and for the most part very young men are fools. Your mother's a sport, but since you have a lover in Canada, perhaps her letting you go was strange."

"Harry's an old friend and almost like a relation," Evelyn replied and sent Hannah off, but when she shut the door she pondered.

Kit was in Canada. There was the trouble, because Evelyn felt he need not have gone. She knew he had not cheated the shipyard company. Kit did not cheat, but he was ridiculously proud and he ought not to be generous where his generosity cost her much. Harry, of course, was another sort, and Evelyn knew him selfish, but she approved his cleverness, and to some extent he attracted her. Anyhow, she liked excitement, and in a few days

she would be back at Netherdale. She got up and thoughtfully studied her clothes and hats.

A week or two afterward, Jasper, going to a Cumberland ironworks, stopped for the week-end at Netherhall. The evening he arrived was cold and a savage wind beat the thick walls. After dinner the party went to the drawing-room fire, and by and by a servant carried in a card.

"The gentleman is in the hall."

Alan Carson took the card and turned to Jasper. "Thomas Blake; a Glasgow address! Looks like a business card. I don't know the fellow. Perhaps a shipbuilding customer has got on your track."

"I'll see what he wants," said Jasper and went off with the servant.

A fire burned in the big hall, but only one lamp was lighted and the illumination did not carry far. A young man and woman waited by the fireplace and got up when Jasper advanced. The girl's look was embarrassing and her face was pinched by cold. Her clothes were ordinary outdoor clothes, and Jasper thought them cheap. The young man's look was resolute.

"Mr. Carson? Christopher Carson's uncle?" he inquired.

Jasper was interested. He thought Blake wanted Alan, but he did not yet know if the young fellow ought to see him.

"Christopher is my nephew. Perhaps you were his friend at the shipyard?"

"He thought me his friend," the other replied and indicated Mrs. Blake. "I could not leave my wife in the car; when we were on the moors the wind

broke the hood. Besides, I rather wanted her support.

Jasper turned and pointed to a seat in the corner by the big grate.

"When the *Hellan* wind blows down the fells the cold is keen," he said, and rang for a servant. "Bring some wine and sandwiches, and let Mrs. Carson know I'll be engaged for a time."

Mrs. Blake drained her glass and went to the fire, for she was very cold and bore some strain. Jasper knitted his brows and waited. Mabel thought he harmonized with the big austere hall and dark panelling, but somehow he was like Kit, and she was vaguely comforted. Blake pushed back his glass.

"I thank you for your kindness to my wife, but I mustn't take your hospitality. Well, I was at Newcastle and I resolved to see you. To begin with, do you know where Kit Carson is?"

"Kit is in Canada. Perhaps I could find him, but I don't know."

"You imply that you were willing to leave him alone?" said Mrs. Blake. "Well, Kit need not have gone! You must tell him he need not and you must try to bring him back——"

Jasper had begun to see a light, and he gave Mrs. Blake a smile. "It looks as if my nephew had a strong champion; but I doubt if he would come back. He is independent, and I understand he's satisfied in Canada. You might, however, state your grounds for thinking he need not have gone, unless, perhaps, your husband feels he ought to do so."

Mrs. Blake was puzzled. When Kit talked about

his uncle he said Alan was a kind old fellow and a good sort, but somehow Mabel had pictured a rather futile country sportsman. Carson, however, was not at all like the portrait Kit had unconsciously drawn. Jasper saw she was puzzled and thought he could account for it. Then Blake faced him as if he tried to brace up.

"If you will give me a few minutes, I'll try to enlighten you. When Kit was at the shipyard he was our friend and was often at our flat. Perhaps you know about the small, fast steamer we built for a foreign government?"

Jasper nodded. "Your boat was beaten. The opposition yard used a better boiler."

"They used *our* boiler. You see, the head draftsman and Kit had worked out improvements we could not patent. The opposition people bought the plans."

"The company is large and important. I doubt if the directors would agree to bribe a competitor's servant."

"It's possible the directors did not know. Managers and secretaries transact the business, and perhaps you can picture an ambitious head draftsman's saying nothing. Then, the bribe was not very large, and might be charged to an account. As a rule directors don't investigate——"

"All are not confiding," Jasper remarked dryly. "However, your employers believed somebody did sell the plans, and Kit was implicated."

"That is so, sir," said Blake, and his face got red. "Kit had nothing to do with it. I stole the plans!"

"Ah!" said Jasper. "Now I begin to see why

you wanted Mrs. Blake's support! I suppose she urged you to make your rather late confession?"

"Tom was slow, Mr. Carson, but it was for my sake he took the bribe," said Mrs. Blake. "His pay was small and he had debts he did not want me to bother about. All the same, I cannot justify him; there is no proper apology."

"How long have you known your husband's part?" Jasper inquired.

Mrs. Blake blushed, but she faced the stern old man. Although his look was daunting, somehow she was not afraid.

"I think I knew for some time. At all events, I knew Kit did not steal the plans, but I hated to think Tom did so. Then to inquire got harder; I dared not run the risk. All the same, I was bothered about Kit. He did not write and we could get no news, but we knew he had not much money."

Jasper nodded. A woman's habit was to fight for her child, and perhaps she was justified.

"Kit, no doubt, intimated that his relations were not poor."

"Ah," said Mrs. Blake, "so long as you thought him dishonest, we knew he would not take your help!"

"I rather think you know my nephew," Jasper remarked, and turned to Blake. "Well, at length you allowed your wife to persuade you to be honest! Since the company could not send you to jail, frankness would not have cost you very much at the beginning."

"I was afraid for my post, sir. Had the company sent me off, I was done for. Then my luck began

to turn. I patented an invention, a manufacturer was interested. The thing began to go, and now we have started a workshop——"

"You are not rash," said Jasper dryly. "When you no longer wanted your post, you resolved to vindicate your pal! Have you informed the shipyard manager that Kit is innocent?"

"When I get to Glasgow I'll write a letter," Blake replied with some embarrassment. "I thought I'd first see you and find out where Kit was."

Jasper knitted his brows. Blake obviously thought him Alan, but Alan must not meet the fellow. For a time he would sooner the others did not know Kit was vindicated. Jasper was sorry for Mrs. Blake; the car's hood was broken and she had not proper clothes. For all that, he must let her go.

"You must write to Mr. Colvin; but you had better state you have informed me," he said to Blake. "I doubt if you can cross the moors, but there is an inn not far aff."

"We must get back to the main road; we telegraphed for a room at a Carlisle hotel."

"It will be some time before you get to Carlisle, and Mrs. Blake will need food," said Jasper.

Mabel ate some sandwiches and forced one or two on Blake, and then Jasper let them go. When they started he went back to the drawing-room.

"The fellow was an engineer and his wife was with him," he said to Mrs. Carson. "I gave them some wine and sandwiches."

"Of course," said Mrs. Carson. "Since he did not stop for the storm, I expect his business was important."

"In a way it was important," Jasper agreed.

CHAPTER XXIV

A STOLEN EXCURSION

DUSK had begun to fall, and Evelyn, returning from Netherdale village, stopped at the garden gate. Dark came early, Mrs. Haigh was not at home, and the evening would be long. In winter the evenings were intolerably long, and Evelyn rather moodily looked about.

A half-moon rose behind the trees and the wind had dropped. The sheep knew the night would be fine and went up the hill to pastures by the limestone crags. On the long, dark slopes their faint bleating was musical. Down the dale, where all was indistinct, a farm dog barked.

The silver-firs about the house were sharp, black spires, but the moon touched their tops and the needles reflected the light. Evelyn smelt resin, and thyme in a plot across the hedge. Sometimes, when Kit was with her, she had sensed the beauty of the quiet dale, but Kit was gone and all was flat.

Evelyn knew her beauty. She wanted excitement and admiration; in fact, she wanted to try her power. Yet when she married Kit she must, perhaps for long, be resigned to sober economy, and rather

give than get. Evelyn was not generous, and she vaguely knew she had not much to give.

Mrs. Haigh was poor, and although at Netherdale she was important, she owed much to Mrs. Carson's friendship and, so to speak, shone in the other's reflected light. Mrs. Carson, however, forced one to pay for her favors. Her rewards were not very liberal, but her punishments were stern.

There was the puzzle, for although Mrs. Carson did not approve Kit, Mrs. Haigh had been his friend and sometimes his resolute defender. Recently Evelyn had begun to remark a change. Mrs. Haigh did not talk much about Kit, and when she did talk she was apologetic. Then it looked as if she began to cultivate Harry Ledward; at all events, she was willing for him to cultivate Evelyn.

On the whole, Evelyn liked Harry, and she was annoyed by Kit's carelessness. Jasper Carson was his uncle, and his duty was to push his nephew ahead, but Kit had antagonized the old fellow. Then Kit had given up a good post in Canada. His letter was vague, but Evelyn was persuaded he had allowed a rash impulse to carry him away. All the same, to brood about it would not help, and she opened the gate.

In the path she stopped. An engine throbbed, a bright beam sped along the hedge, and a car rolled up to the gate. Ledward jumped down and pulled off his thick gloves.

"My luck's in! I did not know if you were at home."

"Your doubting's strange," Evelyn rejoined.

"Our rule is to be at home, but to-night mother is not, and she will not be back for two or three days."

"Then I expect it's dull for you," said Ledward. "You don't like to be alone."

Evelyn remarked his sympathy. Kit would not have thought about her being lonely.

"Are you at Netherhall?" she inquired.

"I was at Sheffield and am going to meet my employer at Netherhall. When he was called to a steelworks on the coast I took the road. Will you come and look at my new car?"

Evelyn went. She was not at all a mechanic but she knew the small car was expensive, and she was envious. It would be long before Kit could buy her a toy like that. She pictured his playing the violin for the cook, and by contrast with Ledward's extravagance the picture jarred.

"From Sheffield is a long way," she said in a careless voice. "I suppose the car is fast?"

"Would you like to try? The evening's fine and the wind is gone."

"If you will come in, I can give you some tea, and I might afterwards go to Netherhall."

"I have another plan. Suppose we get tea at Hadriansford? I reckon we could get there in forty minutes. The road's pretty good."

Evelyn hesitated. Hadriansford was twenty miles off, and Mrs. Haigh was not at home. All the same, she wanted to go. To steal off to the little town would banish her moodiness.

"If we could be back in two hours——"

"I'll promise to do so," Ledward replied, and Evelyn went for a thick coat.

The car climbed a long hill, and at the top Evelyn looked about. Although the moon was shining, the sunset was not gone, and far off across the misty plain the sky was red. In front, the moor, broken by dark gullies and dotted by sparkling pools, rolled back in the moonlight, and the wet road was like a silver riband. A curfew called, and the high, trembling note gave the wilds a touch of mystery.

Evelyn admitted that all was beautiful, and she pictured Kit's enthusiasm for the moors when they picnicked at the tarn. The open spaces called Kit; he was romantic and followed his bent. He stood for something fine and elusive, and she had tried to play up, but her pluck was not like Kit's. Where she hesitated he went joyously forward.

Ledward was rather her sort; he stood for prudence, comfort and conventional rules. Although he had tempted her to adventures, she knew she risked nothing. Harry, so to speak, was safe and solid. Now he wore his thick driving coat his figure was bulky, but its bulkiness was somehow reassuring. He kept the crown of the road, and when they plunged into a ghyll his foot was on the brake. Evelyn approved his caution, but Kit would have let the car go.

"You are Jasper Carson's secretary, are you not?" she said.

"I rather think I'm his *factotum,*" Ledward replied with a laugh. "I help where he reckons my help is useful, and undertake odd jobs."

"Kit was really the man for Jasper."

"That is so," Ledward agreed. "Had Kit wanted the post, it was his, but he did not. However, I

think you admitted I did not push him out. When Jasper engaged me Kit was gone."

Evelyn acknowledged that she could not logically make Ledward accountable. Kit ought to have stayed and claimed all that was his.

"Do you like Jasper?" she resumed.

"I don't know," said Ledward in a thoughtful voice. "The old fellow's just, and although I'm his servant he's polite. All the same, he's baffling, and his humor's grim. Sometimes I feel he's cynically amused, but I cannot see the joke."

He stopped, and Evelyn thought he pondered. The moon got bright and the pools in the road sparkled. The moor was gray and silver, and melted into blue; on one side, faint black hills cut the sky. In the distance were two or three dim lights. A covey of grouse flew noisily across the headlamp's beam. When they vanished all was quiet but for a little beck in the heather. The tinkling splash got louder, and Evelyn saw the road went down-hill.

"In the North evenings like this are not numerous," Ledward remarked. "When the moon's on the heather and the sky is serene, the moor has some charm."

"When all you hear is the wind and the sheep, serenity gets monotonous," Evelyn rejoined. "In winter Netherdale's deadly quiet, and winter is not short. I like crowds and lights and noise, and sometimes I feel the dale's a prison. Perhaps it explains my agreeing to our excursion."

"Hadriansford is not remarkably noisy. Then you have some social functions; perhaps festivities

is not the word. For example, Mrs. Holroyd gives a ball. I suppose you're going?"

"Oh, yes," said Evelyn. "A ball for us is an important event. We get two a year, and as soon as the night is fixed one begins to calculate. You see, to disguise a modern frock is hard, and to bring an old one up-to-date is almost impossible. Well, one goes, and when one comes back one feels like Cinderella; only the prince does not arrive."

"The prince is occupied in Canada! Well, Kit is something of a prince. Anyhow, we have some grounds to think him royally generous, and he's royally extravagant."

"Is extravagance royal?" Evelyn inquired, and her voice was hard, for she weighed Ledward's remark.

"I admit I don't know; but Kit's royalty is not modern and constitutional. He goes back to the old spacious days of the minstrels and wandering knights. Perhaps Richard Lion-heart is his type. You can picture Kit's stealing across Austria; he'd think it a first-class joke. Was he not something like a minstrel at the Canadian camp? Richard, however, did not cheat his enemy, and to get him out of jail cost his subjects much."

Evelyn smiled, but she wondered whether Harry implied that others must pay for Kit's exploits. If it were so, he did not exaggerate, for she had begun to meet the bill.

They crossed the edge of the tableland; the road went down steeply and in the distance the reflections from a furnace glimmered in the sky. Lights dotted the dale, and chimney-stacks and smoke marked a

coalpit. A shining train curved along the hillside and vanished. Then the road went round a bend and Ledward slowed the engine.

"The moors and the moonlight are done with. We are going down to the gas-lamps and ground we know; in fact, I think we are going where we belong."

"It looks as if you were happy to get back," said Evelyn.

"Oh, well, when you're not romantic the heights are bleak and cold. On the whole I'm not romantic. My job's where people make things and dispute about the price."

"You like a safe job?"

"Safety first is a useful rule," Ledward agreed. "For all that, where I thought a risk worth while I might risk something."

The hill got steeper and he concentrated on his driving. Dry-stone walls enclosed boggy fields, and one side a high bank bordered the curving road. The splash of water indicated that a little beck flowed through the gloom.

By and by the bank cut the view, and when the car went round the curve Ledward's foot jarred on the brake. A few yards off, a smoky light melted in the headlamp's beam, and Evelyn saw a cart across the road. Nobody was by the horse, but boots rattled on the stones and a dark figure jumped from a gate.

The cart carried a load of turnips and the horse's head was down. Where the rope-traces rubbed, the animal's coat was white, and the steam from its sweating body floated about. In the dazzling beam

all was distinct; cart and running driver leaped out of the dark like a cinema picture.

Evelyn knew the man could not reach the horse in time to avoid a collision. Ledward could not stop the car, and the horse was at the side by which he ought to pass. He swerved, let the brake go, and steered for the bank. The wheels went up, the car tilted, and Evelyn was flung about. Ledward stuck to the wheel, the inclined seat got level, and they were in the road.

"All's right, I think," Ledward gasped, but Evelyn knew him cool. "There's not much use in stopping; I don't expect the fellow would argue logically. Besides, he was forced to open the gate, and if the horse had fronted up the hill it could not have held the load."

"Don't talk!" said Evelyn. "There's another corner."

"I don't expect another cart," Ledward rejoined, and steered round the curve.

For a time Evelyn was quiet. Harry had not boasted; where a risk was justified he did not hesitate. Had he tried to stop, they must have struck the horse. She pictured the broken car, the plunging animal, and herself, battered by its iron shoes. Well, Harry had saved her. He was not at all athletic, but his nerve was good, and she mechanically contrasted him and Kit. Kit was moved by impulse; Harry calculated and went where he resolved to go. Evelyn thought he would go far.

The valley got wide and lights dotted the slope to a river. By and by Evelyn saw noble trees and an abbey behind the branches; then they rolled across

a quiet market-place, by a dark tower, and up a broad street. Ledward stopped in front of a white hotel, and they went to the spacious old-fashioned dining-room. Ledward pulled out his watch.

"If we must be back when you stipulate, we ought to start in half an hour."

"My holidays are not numerous, and since I did steal off, I think I might risk another hour," said Evelyn with a smile.

Ledward summoned a waitress, and the food she brought was good. But for two gentlemen at the other end, the big room was quiet, and Evelyn began to talk carelessly.

"You are Mrs. Carson's relation, and she was a Netherdale Loreburn," she said after a time. "The Carsons are another type. Do you know much about them?"

"I know something about Jasper Carson. It looks as if he interested you!"

"People do interest me, and Jasper's a commanding figure," Evelyn agreed in a thoughtful voice. "Sometimes I imagine he rules us, but I mustn't be fanciful—Kit claimed his independence and defied his uncle."

"I wonder," said Ledward. "Jasper likes control and people go where he wants. However, all I really know about the Carsons is: Jasper's grandfather was a blacksmith; he started a little machine shop and mended things for Lancashire cotton mills. He obviously got rich, for his son, Thomas Carson, built a foundry, and afterwards a forge. Canada was developing and for some time bought iron goods in England. The Carsons cultivated the trade and

Canadian manufacturers liked their stuff. Since then they have speculated in Canadian industries. The connection between some English families and the Dominions is rather remarkable——"

"Mrs. Carson's lot go to India," said Evelyn. "But please don't stop."

"Thomas Carson had three sons. Jasper got the forge, which is now famous; Alan, for a time, carried on the foundry; Kit's father went to a shipyard and married a concert singer. When he died he was poor. In fact, only Jasper seems to have inherited the blacksmith's talent."

"Nothing indicates that Jasper's ancestor was a blacksmith."

"Oh, well," said Ledward, "the old fellow's cultivated and his friends are famous steelmakers and engineers. All the same, sometimes one senses the Lancashire workman's vein. I think my aunt does so, and Jasper knows. On the whole, I expect he's amused, but his springing from the old Lancashire radical may account for some antagonism. Anyhow, I am cautious, although he's a just, and rather kind, employer. Well, I mustn't bore you! The theatre is shut, but I see a good picture advertised. Should we look in?"

"Let's go, said Evelyn. "Mother would not approve, but after Netherdale the cinema's exciting."

They went to the picture house and stayed for a time. The film was not remarkably exciting, but to sit in the dark by Ledward carried a thrill of intrigue for Evelyn. When they were in the street Ledward went towards the station.

"The hour you fixed is nearly up; but we might get some new magazines at the railway bookstall."

He bought Evelyn one or two women's magazines, and then a train arrived, and they waited to let the passengers go by. A big lamp was overhead, and not far off a gate opened to the road. By and by Evelyn turned rather quickly and Ledward looked round. Jasper Carson came along the platform.

Ledward calculated. The gate was six or seven yards off, but since the people steered for the main door, he and Evelyn, standing by the bookstall, were rather conspicuous. He gave Evelyn a careless glance and thought her disturbed, but she obviously waited for him. Ledward would sooner Carson had not got off the train.

"We'll meet him; I don't suppose he'll keep us long," he said, and they crossed the platform.

Jasper stopped and gave Evelyn a smile, and Ledward a nod.

"I thought you started soon after breakfast, Harry. Did the car bother you?"

"The car went very well, sir, and I got to Netherdale some time since. The evening was fine, you have kept me pretty busy, and I thought I'd like a run across the moors. Miss Haigh was willing to spend an hour at Hadriansford. We got tea and went to the pictures."

"Exactly!" said Jasper. "Your explanation's rather long. Were I young, I would feel Miss Haigh's willingness was all I need state. But my train goes in a few minutes and I must telegraph Alan to send the car. I suppose he does not expect me until the morning?"

"I was not at Netherhall. You see, I stopped at Mrs. Haigh's——"

"Then, since your aunt does not know you were in the neighborhood, she will not wonder why you do not arrive," Jasper remarked. "If you drive fast you may get back for dinner. Well, my porter waits. Good-night, Miss Haigh!"

He crossed the platform and the others went to the hotel. Ledward talked carelessly, but he was annoyed, and Evelyn was thoughtful. Jasper had indicated that he sympathized and would not enlighten his hosts about their excursion. The trouble was, his doing so implied that he knew the excursion was stolen. Moreover, he knew Evelyn was, conditionally, engaged to marry Kit.

Jasper sent his telegram, and when the train started smiled, a cynical smile that nevertheless carried a hint of satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXV

LEDWARD'S PRESENT

EVELYN folded her ball dress and tried to be resigned. The dress was a triumph for clever economy, but it was not all she wanted, and she thought luckier girls would know the country milliner's touch. The shoes and gloves, for which she had sent to town, however, ought to be good, and would soon arrive by the evening post.

After a few minutes she heard steps on the gravel path, and a servant carried in some letters and packages. Mrs. Haigh gave Evelyn the packages and cut open the envelopes. By and by she looked up.

"The letter is from Kit; he sticks to his undertaking scrupulously. Some time must go before his next letter is due, but he thought he might be allowed to write me, and his news is not very good. He's still at the company's workshops, and doubts if he will get back to the bridge. I imagine he's disturbed about it; but you can have the letter. It's not at all romantic."

"Kit is scrupulous," said Evelyn, and took the letter.

The lamp was between her and Mrs. Haigh, and

to know she could not be studied was some relief. On the surface, Kit's remarks were cheerful, but Evelyn knew him to be disappointed and saw he thought he must be frank. He got the same pay as at the bridge, but his work was a junior draftsman's work. At the drawing office one could not use one's abilities, promotion was slow, and so forth,

Evelyn frowned, for although she was sorry for Kit she was resentful. Kit did not know when his luck was good. In England, his folly had cost him his uncle's support; in Canada he had, with typical rashness, refused to seize a fresh opportunity. Well, she must not allow Kit's disappointment to damp her spirits for the ball, and she began to open the packages.

The shoes and gloves were satisfactory, and she picked up a small cardboard box. She thought she had ordered nothing that would go into the box, and with some curiosity she broke the seal. Inside was a Russia leather case, and in the case a jewel. Evelyn's eyes sparkled, but she covered the box with her hand. Mrs. Haigh studied a document, and her look implied that the document was the dressmaker's bill. Evelyn took a card from the box and knew Ledward's hand. He stated that her birthday was soon and he hoped she would wear his present at the ball. If he could get there he would claim a dance.

For a few minutes Evelyn was very quiet. Her birthday was not yet, but it looked as if Harry knew she wanted an ornament for her ball dress. He knew her proper color; Harry noted things like that.

The trouble was, he would think her wearing his present significant, and she had meant to use Kit's.

The jewel Kit had given her was small and the setting plain. Harry's was large, and the goldsmith had used his art to mark its beauty. Evelyn noted the contrast. She ought to wear Kit's humble gift and send back the other, but she hesitated. Her jewels were few; the splendid stone sparkled, and she would hate to let it go. Then Harry would see all her refusal implied.

Evelyn admitted she did not want him to see. Kit was her lover, but he was at the Canadian bridge works and she must stay at dreary Netherdale. Sometimes Harry banished the dreariness, and although he was not, like Kit, romantic, he was clever and would be rich. He stood for much she wanted: modern cultivation, fashion, and the thrill of the city. If she married Ledward——

She stopped. She did not want to marry Ledward, but she saw where she rather carelessly went, and where Ledward, who was not at all careless, tried to steer her. In the meantime she must wear one of the two presents, and she shrank from choosing. Besides, if she chose Harry's she could not cheat her mother. Getting up, she carried the box to Mrs. Haigh.

"The note is Harry Ledward's."

Mrs. Haigh took the jewel, and when it sparkled under the lamp her mouth got tight. Then she studied the writing on the card and smiled.

"He shows some tact."

"Harry is tactful," said Evelyn. "But I don't see what I ought to do."

Mrs. Haigh gave her a keen glance. Evelyn's color was rather high and her hands were not still.

"My rules are old-fashioned, but when I was a girl one took presents only from the man one was going to marry. In the circumstances, your hesitating is perhaps ominous."

"I rather think some modern girls take all the presents they can get," Evelyn remarked.

"Had Harry considered you their sort, he would not have sent the jewel."

"Then you think I might keep his present?"

"I think you ought to weigh things; perhaps you have begun to do so," Mrs. Haigh replied in a meaning voice. "Kit is an attractive fellow, but some talent for engineering and music is all he has."

"Yet you knew his poverty and you were his champion!"

"I am Kit's friend, but I am your mother, and I would sooner you did not begin a fight like mine. To go without is not all the trouble; poverty means hateful shabbiness and humiliating pretense. Then Kit was not forced to be poor. He was willing, in a sense he chose, to be poor."

Evelyn felt the statement was accurate, and she waited. For a few moments Mrs. Haigh pondered and then resumed:

"Kit is properly Jasper Carson's heir, and I believed Jasper meant to acknowledge his claim. His plan was to try Kit at the shipyard, and if he was satisfied send him to the forge. By and by Kit might have been his partner. The trial was not satisfactory——"

"But you admitted you did not doubt Kit's innocence."

"I think Kit, carried away by his boyish generosity, paid for another's fault," Mrs. Haigh agreed. "The important thing is, Jasper knew. When Kit resolved to start for Canada, his uncle was willing to help, and although Kit did not want his help, I doubt if he was offended. He liked the boy's independence. In fact, Kit got his chance to vindicate himself."

Evelyn saw a light and the blood came to her skin. Kit's innocence and his romantic charm had not moved her mother. Only his uncle's suppostitious plans for him had weighed. Mrs. Haigh had reckoned on his being Jasper's heir.

"You imply he disappointed Jasper another time?"

"It is rather obvious," Mrs. Haigh replied. "As soon as Kit arrived in Canada he joined his uncle's antagonists. Then he gave up his appointment and went to the bridge works, where he admits he cannot make much progress. He does not state why he went, but I expect something like a repetition of his folly at the shipyard accounts for it. Well, Jasper Carson is sternly practical, and has no use for fools. He has done with Kit!"

"You want me to copy Jasper?" said Evelyn in a queer, hard voice.

"I want you to consider. That is all," said Mrs. Haigh, and went off quietly.

Evelyn put away her clothes and gloves and sat down by the fire; she felt she did not want to go to the ball. Harry was going, and he had forced her

to indicate whether she was loyal to Kit. If she sent back his present, he would know.

Then her mother's calculating cleverness jarred. Mrs. Haigh had supported Kit because she thought him Jasper's favorite; when she knew he was not she supported Ledward. She knew where to stop, and when she had pointed out the consequences of Kit's folly she allowed Evelyn to finish the argument. Since Harry had the advantages Kit ought to have got, the argument was plain.

Although Evelyn knew herself shabby, the advantages weighed. She liked a noble part, and until Kit let her down she had meant to be noble. Romance called, but to follow romance one must be brave, and Evelyn knew her pluck was not very great. Besides, Harry attracted her; he was really her sort, and to some extent Kit was not. In fact, had she not known Kit——

Mechanically she picked up the leather case and pressed the spring. The jewel flashed in the light, and she knew she would hate to send it back. She would go to the ball and trust her luck.

The ballroom at the big country house was crowded and the floor was good. Evelyn was a graceful dancer and her partners were numerous, but she refused to fill her card. Since she had put on Harry's present he was entitled to some reward. Yet she was not ready to give all she thought he claimed, and she rather hoped he would not arrive. In the meantime the music, the crowd and the beat of feet carried her away. She liked excitement and admiration, and she followed her bent. When the dance was over she must go back, like Cinderella,

to Mrs. Haigh's quiet house. Evelyn felt she hated the bleak moors, the savage wind, and the clouds that rolled about Netherdale.

At length, when she talked to a young sportsman, Ledward crossed the floor. By contrast with her brown-skinned, athletic partner, Harry's figure was bulky, but he carried his weight well, and Evelyn noted his urbane confidence. He had remarked that she wore the jewel, and her heart beat.

"I hope you have not forgotten me," he said, and took her from the other.

"I have kept two dances."

"Then I claim both. I don't know if one can earn a favor like that, but I've made some effort. We lunched at Glasgow with a shipyard manager who wanted some expensive forgings for a new liner, and for some time it looked as if I ought to stay; but Jasper's a sport, and when he knew I'd fixed to meet you he sent me off. Then the express was late, and at Carlisle my train was gone. I was forced to use the other line and hire a car for twenty miles."

"You were very keen."

"I don't boast. All I wanted was to apologize because I did not arrive before," Ledward rejoined.

Evelyn doubted. She thought Harry wanted to imply that he was occupied by important transactions and, so to speak, stood for power and riches. To some extent he did so, but the power was Jasper Carson's, and Harry admitted that Jasper let him go. Somehow it bothered Evelyn. She was vaguely, and perhaps instinctively, afraid of Jasper.

"At all events, your keenness was rather nice,"

she said with a smile, and allowed Ledward to steer her into the dance.

The music was good. Although Ledward was strongly built his step was light, and Evelyn gave herself to the rhythm of the swinging tune. She need not measure distance and avoid collision. To do so was Harry's business, and he knew his part. Evelyn thought it important. Harry's rules were her rules, and if she agreed, he would carry her soberly along the safe, beaten track.

For all that, she was vaguely disturbed. Not long since she had dreamed about plunging into the wilds with Kit. Kit had a strange, elfin charm the other had not. He indulged his rather fantastic imagination and he had fired hers. She wanted to follow him and share his romantic adventures, but she was afraid.

With something of an effort she banished her moody thoughts. She knew Ledward saw the jewel shine on her white skin and she felt his grasp get firm, but she did not get the thrill she got when Kit told her she was beautiful. The beauty Kit saw was not the beauty that moved Ledward, and she knew it was not really hers. Yet she had loved Kit for his generous trust.

When they swung at a turn, Ledward held her tight and the jewel touched his coat.

"You dear!" he said softly, but his voice was calm and somehow confident.

Soon afterwards the music stopped and he steered her to a bench.

"The next dance is mine; but perhaps you are tired?"

"Since you were at Glasgow and drove across the moors, I doubt if you are very fresh," said Evelyn.

"In the morning I must be at Sheffield. All the same, if you were my partner I'd dance until daybreak."

"Then you start to-night?"

"In an hour," said Ledward. "Since you must dance with others, I'm willing to take the road."

"To get the Sheffield train you must cross the moors again. Then you must wait for some time at the bleak junction. Don't you feel you're rash?"

"Not at all," said Ledward, smiling. "I expect you know I am cautious, but when I started from Glasgow I didn't bother about the obstacles. All I thought about was the dance I hoped to get."

"Then you must take the next. The band has changed the music. Let's get up."

The violins began, and Ledward gave Evelyn his arm, but he did not take all the dance. When they swung past a door he swept her from the gliding crowd and into the quiet hall. Then he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"You darling!" he said. "When will you marry me?"

Evelyn firmly pushed him back. Her heart beat and her color came and went. To face the crisis was harder than she had thought.

"You mustn't," she said. "You know I'm going to marry Kit!"

Ledward smiled and indicated a bench by the fireplace. Nobody was about, and he leaned against the Jacobean carving a yard or two off.

"Was there not a stipulation? Kit must make good? From a practical point of view, he will not do so. Besides, one cannot marry a will-o'-the-wisp. Kit is something like that."

"At all events, Kit is luminous," Evelyn rejoined. "He shines in dreary places, and one likes to follow the light."

"Ah," said Ledward, "I'm a sober fellow and I have got an awkward antagonist. Kit is fantastic and elusive; but your charm is, you are flesh and blood. You cannot go where Kit goes; he'd lead you into a bog. We are sober people and we need much Kit thinks of no account; for example, money, proper food, fashionable clothes, and houses like our host's——"

He indicated the spacious, panelled hall, and Evelyn heard the violins and the beat of dancing feet. She knew Harry's argument was sound, but her eyes sparkled.

"My ambition's not altogether mean. And if I do like pretty clothes and beautiful houses, I could go without."

"You're a darling!" Ledward declared. "For all that, we live in a modern, materialistic world, and Kit, so to speak, does not."

"There's another thing," Evelyn resumed. "Your present is beautiful, but when you sent it you thought you would force me—— Kit would not have used your plan."

"It's possible. Perhaps I was shabby; but when I weighed all I risked, my pluck vanished. I thought, if you were very kind, you might make a

sign—— Well, you wear my gift. Will you marry me, Evelyn?"

"At the beginning you inquired when I would marry you, and now you're modest I like you better," Evelyn rejoined. "I don't know, Harry. If you urge me, I must refuse——"

She stopped, for a young man crossed the floor.

"Sorry I didn't find you," he said in an apologetic voice. "The band has played the best half of our dance."

"Then we mustn't miss the other half," Evelyn replied, and giving Ledward a smile, went off.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BREAKING STRAIN

THE electric light at the forge test-house sparkled on polished metal and touched the group by a big machine. Two were dark-skinned foreign navy officers; another was consul for the foreign government. Jasper Carson talked to an English naval architect and a steel inspector; Ledward waited by the clerk's table, on which were printed forms and measuring tools. In the background a workman turned a wheel.

A weight travelled slowly along a shining beam. The machine's jaws moved apart and a small bar they gripped got longer; one saw the tough steel stretch. By and by the machine clanged and the bar broke. Jasper pointed to a scale, and taking out the broken pieces, gave them to the clerk.

"Perhaps you would like to check the measurements and calculations, gentlemen. We reckon by decimals," he said.

The steel inspector and the naval architect went to the table. Jasper gave the party cigars and Ledward lighted a cigarette. The forge was a model forge, and Jasper knew the importance of clever advertisement. He liked to convoy shipbuilders and

foreign admiralty officers about his works. They saw all he thought they ought to see, but as a rule he fixed their visits for the evening. Jasper was a first-class showman, and after dark operations at the forge were spectacular.

"Well? I hope the tests are satisfactory," he said when the clerk gave the others the printed forms.

"Moi, je vous en félicite. C'est une merveille!" a dark-skinned gentleman replied in awkward French.

Jasper bowed. "You are polite, *Almirante;* but I think the steel is pretty good. Our own stuff, from the beginning!"

"The stuff is first-class," the English inspector agreed. "In fact, for the high tensile strength the elongation is rather remarkable. The usual plan, however, is perhaps to buy the raw material from the large steelworks."

"We do buy some soft-steel blooms, but where high tension is required we cast the ingots. Although it's possible one or two makers could supply us cheaper, our plan gives us exactly the stuff we want."

"Yours is a rather bold claim," said the naval architect.

"Oh, well, since I talk to experts, for the most part we get what we try for, but sometimes I admit we are baffled."

"You are baffled?" said a foreign gentleman. "Have you not the mechanical rule and the chemical formula?"

Jasper smiled. "Scientific rules are useful, but steel-making is not altogether a mechanical process.

Something depends on the workman's inherited, and perhaps instinctive, skill. There's the weak link, because human nature is not stable. Man goes by sight and touch, and, so far as he is mechanical, a small defect puts the machine out of gear. I expect bad cooking accounts for some bad steel."

"I've known bad brewing accountable," remarked the inspector.

"We use some precautions," said Jasper dryly, and addressed the foreigners. "The rules and formulæ help, but one is fronted by an incalculable factor. Sometimes it's human weakness; sometimes it's the contrary chance, that is as yet determined by rules we do not know. When one gets old, one finds out that man's knowledge is limited."

"Es verdad. Ya lo creo!" said the dark-skinned admiral. *"Monsieur est philosophe!"*

"I'm a steel-forger, and I agreed to show you the process by which we make the goods you want," said Jasper, smiling. "Lets go to the casting-pit."

They crossed a big open-sided shed and climbed to an iron platform surrounding a circular pit. The evening was cold and a boisterous wind blew about the forge and scattered clouds of iron scale. Naked lights in long rows flickered and slanted; dazzling reflections leaped from furnace doors, and a trail of radiance marked the passage of a white-hot bloom. When the noisy truck vanished all by contrast got indistinct but for the sparks that tossed about the crashing steam-hammers.

Engines throbbed, heavy wheels rolled, and metal clanged on iron floors. In the smoke and turmoil shadowy workmen moved about. For a few

moments Jasper leaned against the greasy rails and his glance searched the forge, but Ledward knew he listened. The machines were like an orchestra, and a jarring note would indicate that an instrument was out of tune. Jasper knew the pitch of all; the cold-saws' thin treble, the roll-trains' measured rumble, and hammers' thunderous bass.

The platform was a semi-circle and on each side was a large, pear-shaped iron vessel lined by fireclay. The vessels were pivoted near the middle, and turned up and down. Above each was a hole in the roof. Underneath, four or five yards below the platform, a row of hollow iron molds, about three feet high, went round the pit. In the gloom workmen waited.

"For soft steel we use the open-hearth, but for stuff like yours the Bessemer process has advantages," said Jasper, turning to the pear-shaped vessels. "By comparison with a steelworks plant, our converters are small. Well, we start with the melted pig-iron, a special hæmatite mixture, and we burn up the sulphur, silicon, and so forth——"

He signalled, and a man across the pit replied: "Mr. Marsden's at the cupolas. All's ready, sir."

A bell rang, and a converter tilted until the party looked into its luminous red throat. Then the roof and floor and columns shone, and a ladle swung across the pit. One did not see the stuff it carried, but trembling illumination marked its track. The ladle turned up, and a cascade of liquid iron poured into the converter's mouth. Then it vanished and, but for the ghostly, phosphorescent glow about the converter, all was dark. The converter swung up,

until its muzzle was under the pierced roof, and the gloom was banished by a flood of intense, overwhelming light.

A splendid pillar of flame leaped through the gap. One saw the flakes of scale on the iron floor and the scratches in the plates. Ledward noted the lines in Jasper's face and thought him preoccupied. Carson studied the tossing fire, and then touched Ledward.

"I don't know who is blowing, but the fellow seems clumsy. Go for Marsden; he's at the cupolas."

Ledward nodded and went down the steps. His shortest line was along the platform, but by the converters the rail was cut and the smooth plates were touched by puzzling light and shadow. Harry did not want to risk a plunge to the pit. Crossing the floor, he found the manager by the upright furnaces where the pig-iron was melted.

"Mr. Carson wants you. I think he's not satisfied about the converter man."

"Black's a first-class blower," Marsden replied. "I'll come along."

When Ledward went off Carson resumed:

"The air blown into the vessel is burning up the impurities. As the temperature rises they leave the iron and combine with the oxygen. Each gives the flame its characteristic tint, and the blower goes by time and color. If he did not stop at the proper moment, the iron would burn——"

The flame lost its intense brightness and began to sink. Jasper pulled out his watch.

"All now left is liquid iron, but since we want

tough steel we must back some carbon and a quantity of manganese."

The converter tilted down and stopped. Its lowered mouth pointed obliquely across the platform to the long crowded shed. But for the white glow shimmering about the vessel, platform and pit were gloomy. A bell rang and the ladle swung across the gap. A fresh load poured from its brim and vanished in the converter. The empty ladle swung back, and that was all.

Jasper frowned. The blow was not finished, and delay might spoil the steel. All did not go as smoothly as he demanded at the forge. Yet Marsden was works manager and Jasper must not meddle, unless he were forced.

"You're losing heat," said the inspector. "The fellow's very slow. By George! he's *turning on the blast*——"

To turn on the blast and turn up the converter was the proper course, but the big vessel swung down for a few degrees and its mouth commanded the forge. White reflections played about the fire-clay and Jasper and the inspector knew the fluid metal seethed to the brim. If the full blast were turned on, the load would sweep the forge like an exploding shell.

Jasper jumped for the blower's platform. The inspector was not the company's servant, but he knew the risk the party ran and he pushed the others behind an iron pillar. Jasper vanished in the dark, and the converter began to swing. It went up smoothly, and when the flame leaped out its muzzle pointed for the gap in the roof.

A shout pierced the throbbing roar, and a dark object reeled across the platform. A man's bent, black figure cut the dazzling background. He stretched out his arm, as if to seize the rail, but by the converter the rail was cut, and the man plunged into the pit. The inspector jumped for the steps and workmen ran across the floor.

Ledward, returning with Marsden, saw Jasper fall, and when they reached the casting-pit he lay by an ingot mold. Overhead the converter throbbed and sparks came down in glittering showers. Jasper's eyes were shut, and but for the blood about his mouth his face was colorless.

"Is he dead?" Ledward asked hoarsely.

Marsden felt for Jasper's heart, and then drew his hand along his slack body. He was cool and gentle, for a forge manager knows something about broken men.

"I think not. To move him is risky, but we must get him out."

He turned and waved back the men. Four of the works ambulance pushed through the group. Marsden, kneeling by the ingot mold, gave some orders, and in a few moments Jasper was on the stretcher. They carried him to the office, Marsden telephoned, and soon afterwards a hospital ambulance arrived.

"Go back to the visitors and persuade them Carson is not much hurt," Marsden said to Ledward. "Give them some wine, and when you get them off ask for me at the hospital."

As a rule Ledward's nerve was good, but politeness cost him something, and he was relieved to see

the party go. Then he went to the hospital and joined Marsden in the waiting-room. The night was cold, and Ledward shivered. The room was bleak and very clean, like a prison.

"Have you seen the doctors?" he inquired.

"They haven't finished their examination. I expect the house surgeon will come down presently. The forge and the rolling mills are pretty good customers."

"Do you know why Carson fell?"

"All I saw you saw. Something went wrong and he was in time to turn up the converter. Then perhaps he was dazzled by the flame; or perhaps the jump to the platform shook him. The floor plates are greasy——"

Ledward nodded. "How do you explain the converter man's slackness? Had liquor something to do with it?"

"Not at all. Men who drink much don't stop long at the forge. I expect you think us an extravagant, drunken lot. It's your folks' point of view."

Ledward looked up rather haughtily. Marsden was a clever works manager, but he was not cultivated and was sometimes aggressive.

"Our disputing about things like that will not help. I inquired——"

"Oh, well, I'm anxious, and perhaps I was nasty. Then I'm a steelworker and I know the men; some went with me to a council school. Anyhow our blowers, head-rollers, and hammer-men are aristocrats in a highly skilled trade, and Black is a grim teetotaller. If he got his way, back-street beerhouses

and your fashionable clubs would be shut. I imagine the man was ill, but I'm going to find out."

"You're a queer lot," said Ledward, and stopped, for the house surgeon came in.

"Mr. Carson's obvious injuries are a broken arm and a broken rib," he said. "In themselves they are not dangerous, but for an old man the shock is severe. I must not be technical, and perhaps if I state we suspect some *complications*—— In a day or two I may give you better news, but Mr. Carson must stay with us."

"I suppose we mustn't recommend him to your particular care?" said Ledward. "However, if to modify your ordinary arrangements would help, the company would be glad——"

The doctor smiled. "Mr. Carson is our benefactor, but all our patients are entitled to the best service we can give. So far as your seeing him when he is able to see you and so forth goes, we will not stick to the usual rules."

He let them go, and when they were in the street Marsden said: "I'm wanted at the forge. Will you come back with me?"

Ledward went, and for some time waited at the office. Then Marsden came in and gave him a cigarette. The works manager was short and lightly built, but his mouth was firm and his glance keen. Ledward knew him sternly efficient.

"Until Carson is again about we must carry on," he said. "His Canadian speculations are the London office's business; I'm responsible for the forge. Well, in the North we're blunt, and you begin to see how things are done. The company's a limited

company, but the directors don't meddle; their part's to approve. When you meet the gentlemen you'll reply to inquiries politely and not bother them. You will see important customers and get the sort of orders we can profitably execute."

"The difficulty is, I don't know the sort of orders——"

"I'll tell you," said Marsden. "When fresh transactions are negotiated you will come to me."

Ledward looked at him rather hard. "You consider you are entitled to superintend?"

"I know my job; you don't yet know yours. The office gang are useful clerks, that's all. Then the forge is Carson's main support. For you to cross me and let down the business would be risky."

"Oh, well," said Ledward, "I want your help, and since I'm a beginner I must agree to your control. Have you inquired about the blower?"

"Black was ill. He has been ill for three or four months, and owns he ought not to have taken the night shift. When he tried to turn up the converter he got faint and his hand slipped."

"But you don't allow a sick man——"

"Until Carson sent for me I did not imagine Black was sick, but he has done with the converter," said Marsden grimly. "Well, you haven't smoked your cigarette, and perhaps the story's interesting. You have heard about our war-time extravagance, and all was not exaggeration; but it was the extravagance of folks who, for once, were not forced to pinch. On the whole, in the North we're a parsimonious lot——"

"Anyhow, Black is parsimonious, and his wife

had three hundred pounds. When houses can be got, houses are our favorite speculation, and Black joined a building club. He drew a lucky number and bought two cottages. He claims he has not lost a shift since he began at the forge, and I imagine he saved all the pay it was possible to save. Well, he built and mortgaged, and built again, until he owns one side of a new street. He had not, however, used the end plot, and the plot's important.

"Labor and stern economy imply some strain, and Black is not young. He got tired and knew he soon must stop, but when he did stop he meant to build a corner shop and round off the block. He was not much short of the sum he needed, and although he was ill he carried on. Well, there's the story!"

Ledward got up and threw his cigarette in the grate.

"It looks as if the company and Carson must meet the bill; but I must call at the newspaper office. We don't want a disturbing paragraph printed. I'll see you in the morning."

CHAPTER XXVII

JASPER WAITS

A SERVANT pushed Jasper's long chair across the terrace at Netherhall, and stopping at a sunny spot, went off. Across the lawn bare branches tossed, but the buds were breaking, and under the trees daffodils nodded in the wind. Larches, bright with fresh tassels, checkered the dark firs, and a thorn hedge was touched by shining green. A throbbing noise got fainter up the dale, and the car carried a famous surgeon to the train.

The surgeon had visited Netherhall before, but only Jasper knew all he thought; one was frank with Jasper Carson. His face was thin and his body was slack, but he was something of a stoic, and when his glance rested on the group farther along the terrace his eyes twinkled. His relations knew where to leave him alone, and although he imagined they were curious they would wait.

By and by a young woman carried some documents from the house, put a camp stool by the chair, and pulled out a notebook. Jasper studied the documents and dictated one or two letters. Then he said: "Give me your notebook and read Marsden's letter. Don't read fast."

The girl did so, and Jasper, using the pencil awkwardly, covered a page with clumsy curves and strokes.

"Well?" he said and gave her the book. "Can you read the stuff?"

"Oh yes! Your hand is firmer."

"That's something. I like to feel I command my muscles. But perhaps you think you ought to humor a sick man?"

Miss Niven blushed. "Not at all, Mr. Carson. The characters are properly shaped; you do write better. Besides, I think I'd be afraid to cheat you."

"My despotic days are gone. Authority deserts —but after all I'm not yet dying, and I will not want you for some time. Type the letters and then take a walk; but if you'd sooner rest, I sent some chocolates and a novel by an author you admire to your room. You can go."

Miss Niven went. At the beginning Jasper had daunted her; now she thought she knew him she was his willing servant. Although his humor was grim and freakish, he was kind. When she crossed the terrace Jasper addressed the group on the steps.

"My business is transacted; the *levee* may begin," he said. "*Levee,* however, is perhaps not the proper word, because I don't know when I shall get up."

"Then Sir Antony was not encouraging?" said Mrs. Carson in a sympathetic voice.

Jasper gave her a smile. Since his doctors prescribed quiet and bracing air, he had gone to Netherhall. Alan had urged it, and although he did not think Mrs. Carson was disturbed about him, she was

a polite hostess. She knew his importance, and he was her nephew's employer.

"I have no particular grounds to be encouraged, or daunted. One tries to be philosophical."

"But the fellow told you *something*," said Alan.

"Sir Antony took some wine and knitted his brows. Since his remarks are expensive, perhaps he felt he ought not to be extravagant. In the meantime, mine are not, and I talked. Sir Antony made some notes; I think that was all. It's possible he gave my nurse his confidence, but I doubt."

"We are sorry," said Mrs. Carson, and motioned her husband to be quiet.

Jasper evidently did not want to talk about the doctor's visit, and she knew his man's reserve.

"Do you think you ought to indulge your secretary?" she inquired after a few moments. "Since Miss Niven may feel the contrast afterwards, perhaps it really is not kind."

"Miss Niven is not my secretary. She's a stenographer I engaged for a time from a typewriting office. The time will soon be up, but I may be forced to ask if she will remain."

"I expect she'll agree! Her duties are light and the pay is generous."

Jasper smiled. Mrs. Carson liked to rule, but at Netherhall she was entitled to do so, and where she meddled his habit was to banter her.

"I rather think Miss Niven's pay helps to support two poor but remarkably respectable old people; but I don't know if her duties are very light. She types my letters, reads the newspapers for me, and sometimes selected passages from popular novels.

Miss Niven's muse is tragic, but her reading's spirited. Then she teaches me shorthand."

"Is shorthand useful to you?" Mrs. Haigh inquired.

"So far, I admit it is not, because I cannot afterwards read the script, and Miss Niven is puzzled; but she states I make some progress. Then, when your nervous control is weak, to economize muscular effort helps, and shorthand's advantage is that it is short. But I think I tried to justify my indulging my stenographer. You see, she's a capable young woman and sternly conscientious. I imagine her only weaknesses are chocolate and sentimental novels, and to supply the articles is not a great extravagance."

For a moment or two the others said nothing, but Jasper knew them interested, and their speculations excited his amusement. Perhaps they thought he pondered marrying his stenographer. Sometimes an infirm old man did marry a useful servant.

"Harry wants to see you, and you must not stay out long. The wind is cold," said Mrs. Carson.

The party went down the steps, and Ledward, carrying some papers, advanced.

"Marsden thought you would like to know all we are doing, and we made some notes about the fresh orders on which we have started at the forge. We have marked the prices and the manufacturing costs."

Jasper took the papers and was quiet for some minutes. Then he nodded.

"It looks as if I'm not indispensable! When do you go back?"

"I ought to get the afternoon train. Simmonds calls me to London; he's bothered about the recent Canadian contract, and in the morning he'll give me particulars. If he lets me go soon, I might be back to report before you go to bed to-morrow."

"You earn your pay," said Jasper. "Do you and Marsden agree?"

"On the whole——" said Ledward, and stopped.

"Marsden jars? Well, he's my forge manager. A rough dog, but stanch. Since you have got to work with him, you must use some tact."

For a time they talked about the forge, and Ledward heard the others in a path behind a beech hedge. He thought somebody had arrived, but the dead leaves still clung to the branches and he did not know who it was. By and by he said: "The Savile Tube Company are issuing new shares. The prospectus is attractive, and Marsden states the tubes are first-class. What would you think about a speculation, sir?"

Jasper took the prospectus. "They don't exaggerate much; their stuff is good. The ordinary shares ought to be a sound investment; but I didn't know you speculated. Sometimes when a young man wants money it is because he thinks about marriage. You, however, declared you did not."

Ledward hesitated. Jasper had met him and Evelyn at Hadriansford, and Kit was Evelyn's lover. Moreover, he was Jasper's nephew, but Ledward had not thought the old fellow annoyed.

"Until recently, for me to think about marrying would have been ridiculous," he said. "Now,

perhaps, I would not be very rash. Your generosity would justify the plunge."

"I wonder," Jasper remarked, and gave Ledward a baffling smile. "I doubt if I am generous, Harry; I try to be just. Well, if the lady were not extravagant, you could support a wife."

The others crossed the grass, and Ledward wondered whether Jasper had noted Evelyn's arrival. His remark about his being just was puzzling and somehow ominous. Ledward felt he had got a hint, but he did not see where the other led. By and by Jasper let him go, and Alan Carson came up the steps.

"You were engaged with Harry, and I waited," he said. "We hoped Sir Antony's report might be encouraging, but you did not tell us much, and I thought you were disappointed. Did he not give you some notion about when you might get up?"

"He doesn't know," Jasper replied in a quiet voice.

Alan's look was disturbed, and Jasper knew his emotion sincere.

"After all," he resumed, "I'm getting old, and since, for the most part, I've gone where I wanted to go, when I'm forced to stop I mustn't grumble."

"Your pluck's good," said Alan. "But you made the forge famous, and to give up control and perhaps see others let down the business would hurt."

"For a time, at all events, I expect to carry on. I can trust Marsden, and Harry's useful. He thinks about getting married. Perhaps you know?"

Alan frowned. "Since I can't meddle, I'm not interested. Harry's my wife's relation and your

secretary; but I don't like the fellow. Why don't you send for Kit? He's your man."

"Kit is my Canadian competitors' man."

"If I didn't know your cleverness, I'd think you a fool!" Alan rejoined. "You don't, after all, believe Kit sold the shipyard's plans and joined the construction company in order to spite you?"

"I do not. I think I'm logical."

"Then you ought to bring the boy back and give him a fresh chance. He's an engineer and your nephew. In some respects he's strangely like you."

"I know where to wait," said Jasper in a meaning voice.

"But I don't see——"

"Oh, well, for one thing, Kit has not yet tried his powers. He's good stuff, but he's raw, untempered stuff and hasn't felt the fire and the hammer. At the Canadian bridge he'll no doubt be forced to take some knocks. Well, I'd sooner you didn't talk about it to your wife, and I'm tired. You might call my man."

Alan admitted Jasper's argument was plausible, but he knew his brother, and fancied he had not told him all. He went to look for the servant, and they wheeled Jasper to the house.

Some time afterwards Ledward joined Mrs. Haigh, and she stopped at a bench in a quiet sunny spot.

"Have you heard the doctor's opinion?" she inquired.

"I have not. Jasper does not talk about his illness. All the same, he does not seem to get much better."

"His illness is awkward for you, and no doubt

implies extra labor and responsibility. In fact, one feels you bear some strain. You're preoccupied and you get thin."

"I don't know if it's a drawback," said Ledward, smiling, and pondered for a few moments. He thought he saw where Mrs. Haigh led, and he had waited for a sign.

"My load is rather heavy," he resumed. "Jasper has good servants, but each was required to stick to his particular job, and the control was single. Jasper alone knew the plans, and although the company's a limited company, he, so to speak, held the reins. Now he's forced to let go, the consequences are embarrassing. Since he's remarkably keen, I expect he knew he ought to have an understudy. We of course thought Kit the man——"

"Ah," said Mrs. Haigh, "Kit is rather dull and he's obstinate. When he indicated that he did not want the part his uncle was perhaps entitled to be offended."

"At all events, he offered me the part, and I saw no reason to refuse. The trouble is, I'm not an engineer, but I begin to understand the rather complicated business, and by and by I hope some difficulties will vanish. In the meantime, I think my employer's satisfied."

"If he does not get better, you will have control. In fact, it may be yours for good," Mrs. Haigh remarked in a thoughtful voice.

Ledward felt she gave him his cue, and he resolved to play up.

"It is possible. At all events, Jasper has agreed that so long as I am content the post I now have

is mine. The important thing is, it enables me to support a wife. Well, I expect you know I not long since asked Evelyn to marry me?"

"She refused."

"That is so," said Ledward. "All the same, I thought she hesitated, and her refusal was not very firm. Well, I felt I must not urge her. Kit's my friend; he's a generous, attractive fellow. The trouble is, he's young and impulsive. Somehow I think Canada will claim him, and he will not come back. Then Jasper is willing for him to stay. The ground is awkward, but after all, Kit to some extent did let the old fellow down."

Mrs. Haigh saw his cleverness, but his argument was logical. In fact, she herself had argued like that.

"One must not be shabby, and Evelyn is stanch," she said. "She did not altogether engage to marry Kit, but we agreed, if he made good progress in Canada, we would talk about it again. My stipulation was, he must for twelve months use his best efforts and not bother Evelyn. Well, the twelve months are not gone."

"Do you imply that when the time is gone I might try again?"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Haigh, "my duty is rather hard. Kit trusts me, and he has some charming qualities, but I must think for my daughter. If you can persuade Evelyn, I will not refuse. But I cannot cheat Kit, and you must wait. When he started it was summer, and summer will not be long."

She got up, but she signed Ledward to stay and he gathered she would sooner the others did not

know they had engaged in confidential talk. On the whole, Ledward was satisfied. When he again urged Evelyn he thought he could reckon on her mother's support. Moreover, he imagined Evelyn would weigh the argument by which he had moved Mrs. Haigh. He was now Jasper's favorite, and Kit was done with.

CHAPTER XXVIII

KIT GOES AHEAD

MELTING snow dripped from the bridge-works roof and the snow in the street was gray and honeycombed. The trees along the sidewalk had shaken off their load, and a sunbeam touched the branches and sooty walls. Kit by the drawing office window saw the beam get brighter, and he frowned.

Winter was not gone. In Canada the cold holds on stubbornly, but spring was not far off, and nobody had yet suggested his going back to the bridge. At the office his work, for the most part, was mechanical; he enlarged plans and marked templates for the machine shops. He felt he could not use his talents, and he got no chance to push ahead. Moreover, although he was in the evenings allowed to play dance tunes at the boarding-house, his landlady declared she would not stand for his practicing high-brow music. By and by a clerk crossed the floor.

"Looks as if you were in for it! The boss wants you!"

Kit's heart beat. To be called to the office was ominous, but he believed the plans he had recently

sent to the workshops were accurate. Besides, he had had enough at the bridge-works, and to be fired would not much bother him. He pushed back the door and saw Wheeler. Wheeler was burly and as a rule his look was hard, but sometimes when he talked to Kit his eyes twinkled. His hands were in his pockets and he chewed a cigar. Another gentleman behind a big desk looked up.

"You were a shipyard draftsman, Carson. You know something about working steel plates?"

Kit agreed and the manager gave him some plans.

"Railroad tanks. They're large; the water's alkaline and chemicals are used to precipitate the salts. What do you think about the plating?"

"If Carson states all he thinks, I expect the designer will get a jolt," Wheeler remarked.

Kit wondered whether Wheeler's joke carried a hint, but he did not know and he studied the plans.

"The construction's cheap," he said. "I suppose the pressure's light?"

"The weight of the enclosed water; that's all."

"Then, if the caulking's really good, perhaps the tanks ought not to leak."

Wheeler laughed. "They do leak! They're trickling right across the alkali belt, and to make them tight will cost the opposition high. You see, they're not *our* tanks."

"The company has got an order for a fresh lot along the new line," said the manager. "The railroad, however, will not pay us a better price, and the construction must be cheap. The problem is to carry a heavy load on thin material. If the job were yours, how'd you get about it?"

Kit saw they tried him out; in fact, he had before imagined he was studied. He knew Western engineers thought English methods out-of-date, but he was moved by reckless humor and he had known the bold line pay.

"You are experts and I ought to be modest," he replied. "However, to make a thin joint tight you must have good caulking, and good caulking implies long practice and inherited skill. To begin with, I'd send for an English boiler gang. If you got me men from Lancashire, I'd engage to make the landings tight."

"Carson's young, but he certainly has some sand," Wheeler remarked, and the manager looked at Kit rather hard.

"Your plan won't go. We use Canadian workmen."

"Then, I expect you'll use Canadian material, and perhaps your rolling mills can supply the plates I want. At the shipyard our specialty was light construction for fast small steamers, and we were forced to study problems like yours——"

He drew two or three sketch plans and elevations, and resumed: "There's my notion. The measurements, of course, are not accurate."

"We'll send for you again," said the manager, and when Kit went off gave Wheeler the drawings.

"I believe the boy has got it!"

"Looks like that," Wheeler agreed with a chuckle. "The proposition beat our gang."

"But how do you account for a raw lad's——?"

"The boy was a shipbuilder and I figured on the Jasper Carson touch. We take a kid from a farm

and send him to the machine shops; another from a backwoods store goes to an engineering college. In the Old Country they have folks whose grandfathers handled machine tools. Carson belongs to a lot like that; I guess you can hand him the job."

After a time they sent for Kit and the manager said: "We'll try out your plan and you can start on your calculations. As soon as the plates are rolled, we'll give you a picked gang and you'll begin the first tank on the division west of Harper's. If your tank is tight, you can build the lot and I reckon we can satisfy you about your pay. In the meantime, we'll raise you fifty per cent."

"If the tank is not tight, you can look for another job," Wheeler added.

"Thank you," said Kit. "The test is pretty stern, but I admit it's logical. I must try to make good."

They let him go and when he returned to his drawing board he thrilled triumphantly. If his tanks carried their load, promotion would be swift and for a shipbuilder to put up the tanks was not really hard. He pictured the letter he would write to Evelyn, but when after supper he went to his room at the boarding-house he hesitated and lighted his pipe. To boast was risky; he had boasted at the bridge. The tanks were not yet built, and one must reckon on obstacles. Sometimes thin steel got brittle around the rivet holes; sometimes the rivets did not properly pull up the seam. Workmen were careless, and so forth.

Moreover, Kit began to feel he was not really keen to write. He had not for some time received a letter from Evelyn, and the last was cold and

vaguely resentful. Perhaps she had reason to be disappointed and Kit was sorry, but her grumbling jarred. Anyhow, the thrill was gone. At length, he was going ahead, but his start was late and the proper time to celebrate his triumph was when he arrived. The strange thing was, on the whole he was resigned to wait.

Kit put up his writing pad and got his violin. For half an hour he played merry tunes in the dining-room; and then he and another went up town for a game of pool.

A week or two afterwards a freight train stopped by a creek some distance from the bridge, and Kit and a number of workmen got down from the caboose. A bluff sheltered the spot, and Kit was glad to get behind the trees, for the wind was keen. On the Western plains the snow is thin, and where the rises faced south the grass was dry and bleached. Winter was going but was not altogether gone, and under the boggy surface the soil was frozen. Thick clouds floated about the dreary sky and the light got faint. A flat car carried a wooden house, framed in sections, and Kit called his men.

"We'll put up the shack, boys, and fix the stove. If you want supper and a bed, you have got to hustle."

The house went up and was bolted fast in the dark, although to level the ground was ominously hard. The bunks were fixed and soon the stove snapped cheerfully, and one smelt coffee, frying pork, and the resin in the boards. At supper Kit's appetite was good. At length he had got independent command and his hopes were high. He liked

the gang; the muscular, white-skinned fellows were from city workshops and he thought he knew their type. He had stipulated for a first-class cook, and if good food would buy the men's support, he must risk the company's grumbling about the bill. Kit thought all were content and he went happily to bed.

In the morning he got to work and soon knew he had not an easy task. A solid foundation was needed to carry the big tank, but when he broke the surface the soil was like iron; storms of rain and sleet drove the men to shelter and at night the trampled slush froze. To handle the cold, sharp-edged steel was awkward, and Kit wondered whether he had not started a month too soon. All the same, speed was important and he pushed stubbornly ahead. The gang was willing and the tank began to grow.

One Saturday evening Kit went to the bridge. The big girders now spanned the river and a service locomotive pushed across the rails and ballast for the approach track. Austin had borne the winter better than Kit had expected. His skin was darkened by frost and the reflection from the snow, his step was firm and his look was tranquil. Kit knew him modestly proud, and when he studied the bridge and pictured the effort it had cost he thought Bob had some cause for satisfaction.

On the whole, Kit thought his going to the workshops was justified. Bob had seized his opportunity and, no doubt, would get his reward; moreover, in one sense, to help his friend had not cost Kit much. The trouble was, Evelyn was disappointed and perhaps thought him slack. She did not know his

object for giving up his post, and, when he pondered it, he saw his not enlightening her was significant. He had not expected Evelyn to see he was forced to think for Bob, although Alison had done so and approved his resolve. Well, he was not going to bother about it. Evelyn was ambitious for him, and when the tank was finished she would know he had conquered.

The Sunday was bleak, the dinner Jock gave them was something of a feast, and in the afternoon they sat by the stove and talked. After a time Austin said: "Carrie was delighted to know the bosses sent you to put up the tanks. I'm not at all jealous, Kit, but my wife's your admirer. You attract women of the best sort. Carrie, for example, is fastidious and cleverer than I am, but she has certainly taken a shine to you."

Kit knew Bob, in some respects, was not clever; he did not suspect that Kit and Mrs. Austin had plotted for him to remain at the bridge.

"Oh, well," he said with a smile, "I really think my charm's unconscious."

"Sometimes a charm like that is embarrassing," Austin remarked. "Carrie, however, wants to congratulate you, and if you can stay for a week-end with us, I'd be very glad. When can you fix it?"

Kit said he could not yet get off, and Austin resumed: "Then, since Carrie's coming to see the bridge we'll run out to the tank. In fact, you may have a surprise party, because I expect Alison, Florence Grey, and Harries will join us. They haven't yet been to the bridge and all want to see you."

"That's fine! I fancy my cook will see me out. All the same, I'd sooner you gave me a date."

"Something depends on the weather, but it must be soon. When your letter arrived, Alison was at our house and she was interested. She wants to go with us and she may not be at Fairmead long."

"Then, you think Miss Forsyth isn't satisfied at the creamery?" said Kit in a disturbed voice.

"Not at all. They're putting up fresh plant and a larger building, and she reckons on getting better pay, but she's bothered about her relations in England. An aunt at a lone homestead is sick and may want her. If she's called, I guess she'll go."

Kit knocked out his pipe and for a few moments was quiet. He admitted he was not reasonable, but he hated to think about Alison's going. Moreover, he knew her ambitious, and now she made progress for her to go was hard. Yet when he recaptured her portrait of the kind dalesfolk at lonely Whinnyates, he knew she would not hesitate. Well, he was not entitled to grumble and Bob must not think him disturbed.

"To quit will be something of a knock for Alison, but she's fine stuff," he said.

"Carrie fell for her at the Winnipeg station waiting-room," Austin resumed. "Perhaps because we were happy the picture sticks; the pillars, the marble flags and the shabby crowd; you on your battered gripsack, and Alison on the bench. She was tired and lonesome; Carrie reckoned she was near crying, but when we stopped she smiled. That was all; the smile got my wife. Carrie declared she was clean sand, the sort to stay with a hard job and

help another. . . . I reckon she helped you. At Fairmead she talked about you and when we met up at the bridge I own I put Wheeler on your track. Well, I expect you'd have made good, anyhow; but Alison is accountable for your getting a show."

Kit mused rather unhappily. He knew he did owe Alison much, but he did not altogether see the object of Austin's remarks. Bob was not a sentimentalist.

"As soon as possible you must fix a date for your visit," he said. "If your party cannot get across, I'll start for Fairmead."

They began to talk about something else, and in the evening Kit went back to the tank.

A week afterwards, Kit one afternoon waited by the top of the grade behind the poplar bluff. The spot commanded two or three miles of the undulating line and a black smoke plume streaked a rise. A bitter north wind swept the plain and the dry white grass rippled like the sea, but the soil was hard like concrete. It looked as if arctic winter had returned and Kit thought the landscape's distinctness ominous.

Dark clouds rolled up from the northern horizon; in the south, pale sunshine touched the grass, and bluffs and clumps of brush were sharply clear. In the distance a ravine pierced broken ground, and the small trees and ragged bank cut the gray slope in sharp black silhouette. Kit's visitors, however, would arrive and go by train, and he watched the locomotive steam up the grade.

The flat rail cars stopped by the tank, and Austin helped Florence Grey from the locomotive cab. She

gave Kit her hand, rather as if she were forced, and began to talk.

"Hold the train, Bob, until we collect all the gang. Ted went for Carrie and Alison, and I expect they're on board the caboose. I had not been on a loco, Kit, and Bob put me in the cab, but the engineer wouldn't stand for the lot and Alison has a smart new coat. Come on and help her down!"

They went along the track, but when they got to the caboose Harries jumped off and a brakesman shut the door.

"Where's Carrie?" Florence inquired, and Harries gave her a puzzled look.

"I sure don't know! I thought Mrs. Austin and Alison went with you. They certainly were not at the smith's shop, and when the train was starting I jumped on board."

"Oh, shucks! Didn't you look in the office?"

"Why'd I look in the office? You said I'd get them at the smithy," Harries rejoined.

"You're not very bright, Ted. Alison's clothes are new. Why did you think I reckoned she was at the smoky forge?"

"Search me!" said Harries. "You did think she was there. I don't know much about women's clothes, but you've got some grease on yours."

"Men are like that!" Florence remarked scornfully. "However, Bob's waiting, and I expect the engineer's getting mad."

They started for the front of the train and Harries gave Kit a smile. Kit knew Florence's habit was to dispute with her lover, but he was annoyed, for he had wanted to see Alison. When

they reached the locomotive, the engineer looked out from the cab.

"Two of your party short-shipped? Well, maybe they'll make it on the gravel train. If the pile's not frozen she ought to come along by and by. I reckon she'll go back before us, but the gang will be on board and you better wait. If I see your flag I'll pick you up. So long!"

He shut the window and the cars rolled ahead. Kit and Austin studied the skeleton tank, and then the party went to his shack. Not long afterwards the gravel train steamed by.

Kit's disappointment was keen. Alison had not arrived and all was flat. Sometimes Florence bantered him and he played up. Austin talked and Harries was naively humorous, but Kit could not banish his moodiness. Alison was going to England and he might not see her before she went.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE STORM

AFTER a time Kit heard a locomotive whistle and he went to the door. The wind was very cold and the sky was dark. Thick smoke blew about the wood; the gravel train was stopping for some damaged material Kit wanted to send back.

"If Miss Grey and you don't mind, Bob, I'll go to the bridge," he said. "Mrs. Austin may find waiting dull and I want to see Alison, but I'd like you to stay. For one thing, the cook has planned a supper he declares they couldn't beat at a Winnipeg hotel."

"We mean to stay," Austin agreed. "Florence and Ted have got a holiday, and when I do get off the bridge I'm not keen about rushing back."

"It's going to storm, Bob. We ought to start," Miss Grey remarked.

"You can't start," Austin rejoined. "The loading gang have got the caboose and the engineer won't carry the lot in his cab. Besides, she's a greasy old service loco, and you must think about your clothes."

Miss Grey gave him a keen glance. "You're bluffing, Bob! Kit has framed it up for you to keep me."

"I want to stay; Ted wants to stay, and if you

go we'll be lonesome," said Austin humorously. "Be a sport and see us out!"

"Florence is a sport, but she's blamed obstinate," Harries remarked.

Miss Grey turned and faced her lover, and Kit stole away. Running behind the cars, he jumped on board the locomotive.

"My stuff is on the car. Start her up."

The big engine snorted, the wheels began to roll, and Kit looking from the window saw Miss Grey push back Harries and run for the line. The noisy cars, however, were going fast, and Kit was satisfied to know she could not get on board. He was resolved to see Alison, and he imagined that when he did so Florence had meant to be about.

When the train stopped at the bridge, thin snow had begun to fall and the light was going. Kit went to the office and Mrs. Austin got up languidly from a camp chair. By contrast with the biting frost, the small room was hot, and Mrs. Austin's look was dully surprised.

"Why Kit! Has Bob come back?"

"Where is Alison?" Kit inquired.

Mrs. Austin looked about, as if she expected to see Alison. Then she turned to the door, and remarking the gloom outside, braced up.

"She was here after the train went, but, now I think about it, perhaps she got another."

Kit said Alison had not arrived and saw Mrs. Austin was disturbed.

"Then, I don't know where she is. Somehow we were left behind, and when a man said he thought another train was going Alison went to

inquire. I waited, but we started from Fairmead early and the office was hot. It looks as if I went to sleep. . . . But you must find out where Alison is."

"I'm going to try," said Kit, rather sternly. "You must wait. Bob and the others will arrive before very long, and the cold is fierce."

A few minutes afterwards a workman informed him that a lady had gone along the track. Another stated that the dame had asked about the train and crossed the bridge. Kit went across and at the other end two men admitted they had told Alison a train was loading gravel at a pit along the line.

Kit knew the spot was three miles off and he inquired: "Did the train leave the bridge long before the lady talked to you?"

"About five minutes. As soon as he knew the rail cars were past the pit the engineer pulled out. We reckoned the dame ought to make it before the boys loaded up."

Kit nodded and set off as fast as possible along the track. The plain in front was dark, the savage wind buffeted him, and the snow got thick. Sometimes he struck his foot against a tie; sometimes he plunged into the rough, frozen ballast, and he wondered whether he ought not to have gone back for two or three men and a trolley. To get the men and put the trolley on the rails would, however, occupy some time, and he did not think Alison was far off. When she found the gravel train was gone she would return to the bridge.

For all that, Kit was anxious. As a rule, one did not get a blizzard in spring, but the wind got colder and his hands were numb. The snow was dry and

its dryness implied that the thermometer went far below freezing-point. Then had Alison kept the track, he ought to have seen her from the window of the locomotive cab.

His breath got short and his side began to hurt. Stopping for a moment, he tried to shout, but he doubted if his hoarse voice carried fifty yards. The snow beat his face and all he saw was the tossing flakes. Lowering his head, he pushed on stubbornly although he began to wonder whether he and Alison could reach the bridge. She would be exhausted, and he himself had had enough.

Not far ahead the track curved round broken ground and a short trestle carried the rails across a ravine. The carpenters who built the bridge had put up a small turf shack, and Kit resolved when he met Alison he would try to reach the spot. If they got there, he might stop the rail train.

After a time he fancied something moved in the snow, and he shouted. He heard a faint cry, and plunging forward, collided with an indistinct white object.

"Alison!" he gasped, and she clung to him.

Kit put his arm round her. "Brace up! How far's the ravine?"

"I crossed the bridge not long since, but the camp's the other way," said Alison faintly.

"We're going to the carpenters' shack. Come on!" said Kit.

To advance was awkward. Alison was exhausted, Kit was tired, and one could hardly face the gale. For all that, unless they got to the shack, Kit knew they would freeze. Feeling for the rails with his

boots, he kept the track, and by and by saw a white mound three or four yards in front. The door was not gone, and forcing it open Kit pushed Alison into the hut. Then he pulled off his skin coat, and after breaking two or three matches, got a light.

The roof and turf walls were good, and he saw a cracked stove and a broken box. A few creosoted billets, hacked from a railroad tie, and two or three lumps of coal were in a corner. Somebody had left a sheet torn from a newspaper in which the man perhaps had carried lunch. Then the match went out.

"Pull off and shake your coat," said Kit. "Keep going; I'll light a fire."

He felt for the box, tore off a broken board and opened his knife. His hands were numb, and in the dark to whittle the wood was awkward, but he must husband his matches. By and by he picked up the newspaper.

"Beat your hands," he said to Alison, and when she did so he gave her the matches. "I want a light."

Alison used three or four matches and he carefully put the chips and paper and a fire-stick whittled to a ragged end in the stove. Then the light went out and Alison said: "Are you ready, Kit? The matches are nearly gone."

"Give me another—I think it's all we'll need," Kit replied and Alison, kneeling down, put a match to the fuel.

A pale flame touched the chips and flickered along the ragged stick. A puff of smoke blew from the stove door, and then all was dark.

"How many matches have you now?" Kit inquired.

"Three or four," said Alison quietly.

Kit frowned. His hands were stiff and he could not properly cut the end of the fire-stick, but he pulled out his tobacco pouch. In Western Canada smokers often roll the cigarettes they use, and Kit had some papers. When he found the packet, however, it felt very thin. All the same, he must get a fire. The cold was arctic, and the railroad gangs talked of men frozen by blizzards when all thought winter gone. Kit felt for his wallet.

"We'll try another match," he said.

Alison gave him the light and saw the flame curl about two or three small strips of printed paper. The cigarette papers began to burn, the newspaper smoked and the bottom edge got red. She was very quiet; and Kit's heart beat, for if the fire went out he knew they might freeze. For a few moments the newspaper smouldered and then a blaze leaped up. The fire-stick snapped and a bright beam shone from a crack in the iron. Kit threw in a billet and a lump of coal.

"The fire's going!" he shouted triumphantly.

"This time it lighted soon," Alison remarked. "What were the papers you burned?"

Kit laughed. "I hope they were dollar bills, because I had some larger notes. One talks about burning money, but in the circumstances perhaps I was not extravagant."

He put the broken box in the corner by the stove for Alison, and sitting down, rested his back against the turf. After the turmoil outside, to sit behind

thick walls was some relief, but the shack was very cold and they had not much fuel. Kit doubted if the fire would burn for long. Alison, however, must not know he was anxious, and he began to talk.

"The rail train will soon come along, and now we have got a light I can signal the engineer," he said, and tried to cut a fresh fire-stick from a creosoted billet. "When I saw you were not with Austin I was terribly disappointed. How did you get left behind?"

"Bob ordered the engineer to move some empty cars. It was very cold and Carrie and I went back to the office. Florence said she would call us, but she did not."

"Then Miss Grey knew you were at the office?"

"Of course," said Alison. "She was two or three yards off."

"Harries declares she sent him to the smithy," Kit remarked.

Alison looked surprised, but she resumed: "A man said another train was going, but when I found out where it loaded I had crossed the bridge. The men thought the train would not wait long and I did not go back for Carrie. I wanted to see you, Kit."

Kit noted that her color had come back; in fact, he thought it rather high.

"If I had missed you I'd have started for Fairmead in the morning," he said. "You are going to England?"

"I must go; perhaps I ought not to have waited for the cablegram. My aunt at Whinnyates is very ill."

"But you have recently got a better post, and Bob states if you stay at the creamery they'll make you head clerk."

"Oh, well, I mustn't think about that. My aunt was very kind and my uncle's old. When my mother died I stayed with them and I owe them something. You see, they're old-fashioned, lonely people, Kit, and they don't care for strangers. I am their relation and now they want me I cannot refuse."

Kit agreed, but he was disturbed. In fact, he dared not speculate about his emotions. Perhaps the proper line was to joke.

"But what about the feast we fixed to celebrate our triumph? I'm not yet famous and your aunt may want you for some time."

"That is so," said Alison, soberly. "If she does not get better, I may be forced to stay for good. However, if I do come back, I'll be your guest for dinner when you are famous."

She smiled, but Kit saw she shivered, and he put all the wood and coal in the stove.

"To begin with, we'll celebrate your return by a royal feast. But when you left the bridge did you know how far off the gravel pit was?"

"The men said it was a piece up the track, but I ought to make it before the train was loaded and I hurried off. You see, in four days I must be at Montreal. . . ."

Kit saw she did not want to go without saying good-bye to him, and he was moved. Alison had run a worse risk than she knew, and he pictured his remarks to the railroad men.

"When I got to the pit the train was gone. I saw a storm was coming and I must reach the bridge as soon as possible," Alison continued. "The track curves round some high ground and I thought I'd take a short line across the loop, and I got entangled in the bluffs and when I found the rails again the snow was thick. Until I met you, I was afraid. . . . But do you hear something?"

Kit jumped up. When he pulled back the door a fan-shaped beam pierced the snow, and running for the fire-stick, he pushed the end in the stove. A few moments afterwards he waved the burning stick by the track, but the wind cut the small flame and it presently went out.

Three or four yards off, a high headlamp glimmered like a foggy moon. In the snow the roll of wheels was muffled, and Kit shouted with all his force, but the explosive snorts from the locomotive drowned his voice. The frozen ground shook and he jumped back. He saw the cab windows shine, and then all was dark. Thick smoke blew about him, and when he tried to shout he choked. Indistinct cars rolled by and vanished, and Kit leaned against the shack and clenched his fist.

The bridge camp was two or three miles off; but one could not get there, and the engineer would only stop for Austin to get down. Bob thought Kit and Alison at the office, and when he found out they were not, the train would be gone. Then he might get a hand-car and try to search the line, but the snow clogged the rails and Kit doubted if flesh and blood could face the storm.

Well, Alison must not know and he went back to

the hut. Snow had blown across the floor. The stuff was dry and some about the bottom of the stove did not melt. Kit thought the stove got empty, but the wood and coal were gone. Alison shivered and her face was pinched.

"The train did not stop," she said.

"When she gets to the bridge Bob will send back the locomotive," Kit replied. "In the meantime we mustn't freeze. Suppose you get up and dance?"

Beating time with his numbed feet, he tried to whistle, but he could not command his cold lips, and after a few bars he stopped.

"We must imagine the music; it goes something like that," he remarked and Alison gave him her hand.

To turn was awkward, and when Kit swung Alison round his head struck the slanted roof. Tramping the powdery snow, they went back and he struck the frozen turf. All the light was the reflection from the cracked stove, and one must keep the wall where the roof was high; but Kit thrilled to hold Alison in his arms and for a few moments forgot that they might freeze. Then he got a harder knock and he thought their dancing in the snow was grimly humorous. The joy of harmonious movement was not theirs; they danced in order to keep alive and their music was the screaming gale. One advanced three or four steps and struck the wall; after another few steps one risked a collision with the stove.

Kit knew Alison's pluck, but he doubted if she could keep it up and he began to get dizzy. At length she leaned against him and her body went

slack. Although she was breathless he felt she shivered.

"I'm sorry, but I must stop. . . . If one could go straight . . . by and by, perhaps, we'll try another step."

"Thank you," said Kit with ceremonious politeness. "I can't get you an ice and I doubt if you'd enjoy it. I can, however, find you a cool spot, and our band does not get tired. Since we have not a bench under flowering plants and rose-shaded lamps we must use the box."

He pushed the box against the stove and sitting on the floor, gave Alison his skin coat.

"I'm not horribly selfish, Kit," she said.

"Well, if you like, we'll share the coat. At Winnipeg station I used your rug and the coat is big. I expect it was made for a fat profiteer, and I admit I bought the thing at a foreign broker's shop. Still, when one thinks about it, profiteers don't use coats from which the fur comes off, and perhaps mine belonged to a railroad man. We're not fastidious. As a rule, the men who make things don't get rich."

Alison smiled, but her smile was brave rather than humorous.

"There's no use in pretending, Kit. Suppose the train starts before Austin finds out we are not at the bridge?"

"Then Bob will put a trolley on the line and the boys will shove her along. We are not yet beaten, and we were up against it another time. Let's imagine we are back again at the Winnipeg waiting-room—*pilgrims and strangers, fronting all dangers.*"

"Ah!" said Alison, "Carrie and Bob helped us at the waiting-room."

Kit touched the stove. The fire was very low and the iron got cold. He awkwardly pulled out his watch.

"Bob is starting to help us at the bridge. Don't you see him loading up blankets and sending for his best men? Old Bob is not the sort to let a pal freeze, and a Canadian doesn't stop for snow!"

For a time they were silent. The blizzard beat the walls and the stove got cold. Then Alison said in a quiet voice:

"The train has gone down the line, but I'm not very much afraid. At Winnipeg I was afraid. You see, I knew I must go alone. . . . The snow is getting deep, and I daresay it blocks the track. . . ."

Kit saw he had not persuaded her help would arrive. Well, for as long as possible, she must not freeze, and he took her in his arms. The coat would now go round both and Alison did not push him back.

"If you hadn't bothered about seeing me, you would have been on board the train," he said.

"But, until I had seen you I couldn't go away," Alison replied. "I did see you; you went to look for me in the storm! You don't really think the trolley will reach us. Perhaps it's strange, but I don't bother. . . . I get dull, Kit, and I'm horribly cold."

Kit held her fast and kissed her. His feet and hands were numb, but he thought the warmth of his body would keep her from freezing.

"Brace up, my dear," he said. "Austin has

started and help's not far off. We are going to beat the storm. Now I know you belong to me, and all that's mine I keep!"

Alison said nothing, but her arm was round his neck and for a time he indulged a strange lethargic satisfaction. Then he tried to conquer his languidness. If he slept, he could not fight the paralyzing cold. Only a faint glimmer from a crack marked the stove, and the hut was dark. The door shook and he knew the gale yet raged.

At length Alison said: "Perhaps I was asleep, but I heard bells chime!"

Kit heard the blizzard and thought she dreamed. He said nothing, but Alison turned and tried to get up.

"Something does chime—like cow-bells in a bluff."

"A locomotive bell!" Kit gasped and pulled Alison to her feet. "A train is stopping. Bravo, Bob!"

He let her go, and crept along the wall to the door, for his joints were stiff and his legs would hardly carry him. A loud bell tolled and a light pierced the snow, and Kit shouted. The light touched his face and passed. Then he saw a huge dark mass and steam roared in the gale. Indistinct figures jumped down and a lantern flickered. Somebody ran against Kit and he knew Austin's voice.

"Hello! We've got soup and blankets. Where is Alison?"

Kit turned and the lantern searched the shack. Alison leaned against the wall and smiled, but Kit knew her smile was not for Bob. He saw Austin

and another wrap a blanket round Alison, and one said: "Help me carry her to the cab."

"The job's mine," said Kit, and clumsily lifting Alison, he started for the door.

He struck the post, but he reached the locomotive and somebody pulled Alison up the steps. Then he was on a tool locker in the cab and drank some thick, hot liquid from a nickel cup. The locomotive was going and that was all he knew.

CHAPTER XXX

ALISON STEALS AWAY

KIT, in Austin's office at the bridge, heard escaping steam and a locomotive pump's monotonous throb. When the train stopped, somebody pushed him from the cab, and although he had wanted to wait and see it start, firmly steered him to the office. The painful reaction from the cold was over, but he was dull and slack and could not rouse himself for the effort to go back to the line. By and by Florence Grey came in.

"We are going in two or three minutes and I cannot wait, but I hope you are not frost-bitten," she said.

"I'm not much damaged, thank you," Kit replied. "Anyhow, I'd sooner you looked after Alison and you mustn't miss the train."

"Carrie and Ted are with her, and Bob will call me. There's something I must tell you: Alison ought not to have gone to the gravel pit."

"It's rather obvious," said Kit. "I don't yet see why you and Ted left her at the bridge."

Florence's look got embarrassed and she blushed.

"Since my plan didn't work, perhaps you ought to know. . . . Well, I didn't want Alison to meet

you, and when the train was starting I sent Ted to the smithy, although I knew she wasn't there."

"Ah," said Kit, "now I do see! You hadn't heard the gravel train was going, and you thought in a few days Alison would be on board the steamer. Well if she had got frozen I'd have hated you . . . However, since I'd have frozen by morning, you would not have had much grounds to be afraid of me. You plotted better than you thought!"

"I have got my punishment," said Florence in a quiet voice. "Alison is my chum and perhaps suspense is as hard to bear as cold. Then she doesn't suspect my shabby trick and I dare not tell her. For all that, my object was good."

"Your nerve is pretty good," Kit rejoined. "I'll soon be all right and I'm not revengeful, but Alison ran an awkward risk, and that's another thing. Besides, I can't imagine why you were determined I shouldn't meet her."

For a few moments Florence was quiet and her face was red. Somehow Kit's anger vanished. From the beginning she had doubted him, but when she claimed to be Alison's chum she did not boast.

"Very well," she said, "you are not the man for Alison. You belong to another lot, but you have some charm and she's romantic. At all events you interested her and she thought about you. I don't claim you consciously worked upon her, but it's possible, and when she was called to England I was glad. The drawback was she was resolved to see you before she went. We are flesh and blood, and I thought when you knew she might not come

back you might try to carry her away. Did you, Kit?"

Kit looked up. His mouth was tight and he knitted his brows.

"Yes," he said. "We were freezing and I took Alison in my arms and kissed her. Well, I admit your not trusting me was justified. Alison knows I love her, but I ought to marry a girl in England."

"You must take one of two lines: ask Alison to marry you, or tell her frankly why you cannot."

"That is so. As soon as a train goes down the line I'll start for Fairmead; there's no use in my going to Harper's now, because Alison mustn't be bothered yet. I hope you don't feel you ought to hate me?"

"One cannot hate you, Kit. I'm sorry for you—" Florence replied, and Austin opened the door.

"Come on!" he said. "The engineer won't wait."

He pushed Florence out, and coming back a few moments afterwards, sat down opposite Kit.

"Did Florence state why she sent Ted to the smithy? My notion is she didn't want Alison to get the train."

"It's possible, but we won't bother about it," Kit replied. "How did you get the locomotive?"

Austin smiled. "You're not going to put me wise? Well, when we made the bridge, all Carrie could tell me was you had gone to look for Alison. The snow was fierce and when I found out Alison was at the gravel pit and you had started up the line, the train had left Harper's. I was scared, Kit, but Florence was *desperate*. She declared, if our

feet were cold we could stop by the stove; she would shove off for the gravel pit."

"Miss Grey is obstinate," Kit remarked with a twinkle. "You wouldn't stop for cold feet, Bob, and I daresay you knew mine were colder. But go ahead!"

"We put a trolley on the rails. I hustled Florence into the office and told Carrie to stand against the door. We crossed the bridge and soon afterwards hit an awkward drift. When the trolley jumped the rails we tried to carry her across. The snow was dry and loose and we went in to the waist; the wind lashed the stuff about us, and we must lift the heavy car. I doubted if we could make it, but the boys were willing. They meant to get you."

Kit nodded. "I can picture the fight, but when you're up against a blizzard pluck and muscle won't carry you very far. Well?"

"By and by my foreman came along. They'd got a phone call from Harper's; the train had run into a big drift a few miles east, and the engineer steamed back to the settlement. In the meantime, the Winnipeg bosses had wired the operator to hold all traffic until the plows arrived. He had got my message and he sent the loco to the bridge. We butted her through the drift that stopped the trolley, and made the shack. Carrie and the others are at the Harper's hotel——"

The cook carried in some hot food, and soon after Kit got supper he went to bed.

In the morning the gale had dropped and the thermometer rose, but Kit was forced to wait until the track was cleared. After some hours a big

rotary plow and a freight locomotive arrived from the east, and hurling back waves of snow, rolled across the bridge. When the smoke melted in the plain Kit got a hand-car and two men and set off. The plow had cleared the rails and the car made good progress, but Kit brooded moodily.

He recaptured his walking from Harper's to the bridge when he first arrived. Flowers dotted the prairie, the sun was hot, and although he knew himself a stranger, his hopes were high. The trail, like a dark riband, curved in front and he steered joyously for the horizon.

Now the sky was dark, the day was bleak, and he did not know where he went. He ought to marry Evelyn, but he loved Alison. Moreover, Alison knew he loved her and since she knew about Evelyn she had cause to think him a philandering wastrel. Anyhow, if Alison did not, Evelyn was entitled to do so.

Well, he must take one of two lines, and he frankly hesitated. For him to pay for his folly was just, but it looked as if another must pay. Evelyn's letters were cold and carried a hint of resentment. If she knew he had gone to the workshops sooner than take his friend's post, she would be annoyed; Alison knew and approved. Yet although he wanted Alison, his duty was to marry Evelyn. In the meantime he must see Alison; it was all he really knew.

At length the roofs at Harper's broke the snowy plain, and Kit saw freight-cars on the side-track. The locomotive faced west and he knew the rail train had gone, but he hoped Mrs. Austin would wait for the passenger-cars and her party was yet

at the hotel. When he inquired at the office the landlord said they had started east soon after the plow arrived, and gave Kit a note.

Kit knew Alison's hand, and he went to the stove in the dining-room, but when he tore open the envelope his hand shook. Then he set his mouth, for Alison firmly pointed the proper line.

"There is no use in pretending, Kit," she wrote. "At the shack I was willing for you to know I loved you. You see, my dear, I did not believe help would reach us; I thought we soon would freeze. In the numbing cold, when hope was gone, all I wanted was to have you near me.

"Well, it's done with, and when Florence said you were coming to Harper's I saw I must steal away. You must not cheat, Kit; and if, for my sake, you broke your word I would be ashamed. I would hate to feel I'd stolen another's lover. You must do all you engaged to do, and I will wish you luck. Perhaps my letter's cold, but I must use control and you will not get another. When you arrive I shall be at Winnipeg and soon afterwards on board the ship. Good-bye, Kit. Go straight—the way you like to go—and look in front. By and by the road will get easy."

Kit put the letter in the stove. All was done with, for Alison was proud and firm, but when the paper flared and blackened he clenched his fist.

For a time he was very quiet; and then he heard a locomotive whistle and he went to the track. The freight train was pulling out, the men had put the trolley on a flat car, and Kit jumped for the caboose. He dared not think about Alison and he tried to

look in front. To begin with he must build the tank, and then, if all went weil, he would claim Evelyn. In the meantime he would say nothing; until his work was tested he must not boast.

The blizzard was winter's last belated fury. The snow melted in the hot sun and the bleached grass got green. Sandhill cranes trailed across the sky, and ducks and geese steering north stopped to rest by the prairie sloos. Kit moodily concentrated on his building. To be occupied was some relief and the tank grew fast.

At length, one day when the birches and poplars in the bluff unfolded their fresh leaves, a locomotive and an observation car arrived, and three or four gentlemen got down. Kit stopped the noisy pump that fed the tank and went to meet the party. Although he must reckon on expert criticism he was cool. The job was good, but if the others were not satisfied it would not bother him.

Wheeler presented him to a railroad engineer, and the party walked about the tank and climbed to the top. Kit had pumped in the full load, but all the joints were tight and the steel was dry and clean. After a time the party returned to the open gallery at the back of the car and the railroad engineer said to Kit:

"I like your tank and reckon she will carry her load, but we have agreed about some alterations of which your chief will give you particulars. Although your construction's first-class, we see a better plan to filter out the salts. Will you take a smoke?"

He pulled out some cigarettes and when Kit thanked him went into the car. Kit knew he had got

a compliment from a famous man. Wheeler and another stopped, and Kit remarked his twinkle.

"You have put it across, young fellow! To get a cigar from Jameson is like getting a riband for your coat. He acknowledges you Companion in the Knights of the Track."

"I suppose I ought to be flattered, but I imagined in Canada you had not much use for ribands," Kit rejoined, and turned to the other gentleman. "All I really want, sir, is the company's approval."

"You're modest," remarked the bridge-works manager. "There was a sort of agreement that if you put up the tank we would put up your pay, and if you undertake to build the row the agreement stands. The only stipulation is, you must stay for twelve months, after which we'll talk about things again. The railroad engineers, however, have modified the plans."

Wheeler gave Kit some drawings, and after a few minutes he said:

"I'm keen to stay, sir, and the alterations ought not to bother us. All the same you must use heavier columns and wider plates."

"That is so. We must wait for the material. The molders strike has stopped the foundries, and the rolling mills cannot supply the plates for some time. In fact, we may be held up for five or six weeks."

Kit saw his opportunity. Evelyn did not know his luck had turned. She ought to know and he could go across and see her.

"Before I start on the fresh job I want a holiday and since you must wait for the steel my going will

not embarrass you. I'll undertake to be back in a month, but I'd like to be longer."

"Oh, well," said Wheeler, "I knew you had some gall! Now you have built a tank you reckon we ought to stand for a month's pay?"

"I suppose the pay begins when I get to work, but it's not important. Anyhow, I must go across to the Old Country. The formula is urgent private affairs."

Wheeler turned to the manager. "Carson's obstinate and I reckon his modesty's not conspicuous, but I'll be accountable for his coming back on time."

The other nodded, and Wheeler said to Kit: "You can pull out when you like, and when you claim your pay I guess the clerk will meet the bill. There's another thing—we can fix it for you to get a free ride to Montreal."

Kit thanked him and went back to the tank. Soon afterwards the train steamed off, and sitting in the grass he lighted his pipe. Wheeler was a useful friend. On the surface the fellow was a bully, and where he ruled a slacker's lot was hard, but Kit knew him for a first-class sort. All the same he did not want to think about Wheeler.

Evelyn's letters bothered him. It looked as if she bore some strain and got tired. Well, he was engaged to marry her and so long as she was willing the engagement stood. When he saw her he would know; but she must join him in Canada. He could get a house at Fairmead, and Carrie Austin would be kind. To picture Evelyn's ruling a home like

Carrie's was hard, but Kit began to see she was not the girl her lover ought to leave alone.

Then he knocked out his pipe and smiled, a rather moody smile. He admitted his luck was remarkably good. He had conquered, but in the circumstances his conquering was a grim joke. Alison was gone and all was flat. When he looked forward he saw a long, dreary road. Yet there was no use in brooding, he must brace up and push ahead.

By and by the cook called him for supper; and two or three days afterwards he started for Montreal. When he arrived in Canada he went second-class; now he travelled by Pullman, but the hope he had known had vanished.

CHAPTER XXXI

WHINNYATES FARM

TEN days after Kit left the tank he got down at a quiet station in the North of England. The train rolled on across a bridge, and by contrast with the trains in Canada, he thought it ridiculously small. A few country people crossed the platform, and a farmer's gig and a battered car waited at the gate. Although Kit had telegraphed from Liverpool, the Netherhall car had not arrived and he saw nobody he knew.

Putting his bag and coat on a bench he looked about. The evening was cold, and in the west yellow light shone behind lead-colored clouds. Bleak moors, in dark silhouette, cut the ominous glow; a flooded river brawled under the railway bridge, and the road that went up-hill was wet. At the top of the hill a ragged firwood loomed indistinctly in rolling mist. Kit smiled. It was summer in the north, and all he saw threatened storm.

Netherhall was eight miles off, and the nearest inn was at the village in the dale. Before long heavy rain would sweep the moors and Kit doubted if the car would arrive. It did not look as if his relations were very keen to welcome him, but he reflected

with rather grim humor that he had gone away in disgrace, and although he was perhaps entitled to claim he came back in triumph, nobody yet knew. To some extent, he had been afraid to boast; to some extent he admitted he had indulged his rather boyish pride.

Then he began to think about Evelyn. Where others doubted she believed in him; she had stuck to him nobly and for his sake had borne some strain. After a time, perhaps, she got daunted, but she had grounds for disappointment, and the news he sent had not helped her much. Well, in two or three hours she would know he had made good; but he must take the road.

The wind was cold and Kit put on his coat and seized his bag. He set off briskly, but when he got to the top of the long hill he admitted the bag was heavier than he had thought, and he speculated about the Netherhall car. Mrs. Carson had got his telegram, but perhaps her husband had not. Kit's mouth curved in a crooked smile, but he would not trouble Mrs. Carson for long. Her fastidiousness accounted for his carrying the bag, although he doubted if she would approve the dinner-jacket he bought at Montreal.

By and by he heard an engine throb and he stepped on the grass. A car stopped, and Kit looked up. Two or three large dusty sacks occupied the back, a wing was broken and the shabby paint was scratched. The engine rattled noisily and Kit knew the rattle. In Canada he had used cars like that. A brown-skinned young fellow held the wheel.

"Are you going far?" he inquired.

Kit said he was bound for Netherdale, and the other told him to jump up.

"I'll give you a lift for three or four miles. Don't know, but I might go by village and over gap. I'm carrying some calf meal for Tyson o' Whinnyates; my farm's not far from his. We's see when we get to water-splash."

"Mrs. Tyson was ill," said Kit when the car rolled ahead. "Do you know if she's better?"

"She begins to get aboot, but for a time she was near away with it, and Joe Tyson sent for's niece in Canada."

"Is Miss Forsyth now at Whinnyates?"

"She was there in t'morning when I started for market, but Joe was yoking pony to tak' her to Langrigg, and he reckoned she'd stop for t'night. D'ye ken Miss Forsyth?"

Kit said he met Alison in Canada, and the other resumed: "Then, ye ken a leal, kind lass! She came back four thousand miles to nurse her aunt, and Joe reckons she did as much as doctor to pull old body round——"

He slowed at an awkward corner, and Kit speculated about Alison. If Mrs. Tyson did not need her she might return to the creamery, and Kit hoped she would do so. Alison ought not to remain at Whinnyates; she had qualities and talents she could not use at the lonely farm, but if she did not go soon the moors might claim her. One lost the alert keenness Canadians valued, and in the bleak dales a woman's work was hard. Kit hated to picture Alison's laboring at the byres and perhaps in the fields.

Then a pale yellow beam touched the road and he looked about. Thin mist rolled across the broken moor and vague, dark hills melted in thunder-clouds. The road curved across open heath, and white, wild cotton bent in the wind. Big drops splashed in the pools and stopped. Then a guide-post cut the threatening sky and Kit remarked: "There's your road; I'll get down."

"If we can get through water-splash, I'll go by village. Gap bank's easier than t'other, and she's carrying a good load."

They ran down a hill and at the bottom the driver slackened speed, for an angry flood swept the hollow. At one side a white turmoil and a broken rail marked the narrow footbridge.

"You'll not get across and if I tried't I reckon car would stall," the farmer remarked. "Mireside brig's not far from Whinnyates. We'll go by Birkfell."

He turned the car, and when they climbed the hill rushy fields and wet moors melted in the rain. The car had not a hood, but the driver pulled out a tarpaulin, and crouching behind the battered sheet, they fronted the deluge. Water streamed from the glass and leaped about the wheels. Rivulets cut the mossy bank and one could not see two hundred yards. Kit, however, knew the north, and at Netherdale floods in summer are not remarkable.

After a time the car jolted up an uneven track. Kit saw a wet hillside and by and by white buildings behind bent ash trees. When the car stopped he knew they had arrived at Whinnyates, but Alison was visiting with friends and he would not meet her.

"I must help Joe tak' in bags," said the driver and blew his horn. "I doubt he does not hear us and you might gan to door. When we're unloaded you'll come home with me and wait for rain to blow off."

Kit went up the path, but after a few moments he stopped and his heart beat. Alison came to the door and waved to the man in the road.

"Wait a moment, Jim; I'll send Uncle Joe!"

Then she saw Kit and the blood came to her skin.

"Oh, Kit!" she said, "I didn't know you were back!"

"It looks as if nobody knew," Kit remarked with a twinkle, because he saw he must be cool. "When I arrived, half an hour since, the car was not at the station and your friend picked me up. I was going to his house."

"If you go to Jim's, my uncle will be much annoyed," Alison replied. "But I must send him to unload the meal. Come in!"

"Perhaps I ought to thank your friend," said Kit, and went back to the road, where Jim pulled a heavy bag from the car. Kit did not see Tyson and he seized the bag.

"Help me up with it! There's no use in your getting wet."

He got the load on his back, and lowering his head, steered for the barn. At the door an old man advanced, as if to help.

"Don't bother! Show me where to dump the stuff," Kit gasped.

After a moment or two he threw down his load and straightened his back. The meal stuck to his wet coat, and his soft hat was crushed and marked

by a grey patch. Kit laughed, smoothed his hat, and turned to the farmer. Tyson was tall, but his shoulders were bent. His hair was white and his brown face was lined, and Kit thought him a typical dalesman: the older dalesfolk were not cultivated, but they were shrewd, laborious, independent and frugal. Tyson gave him his hand.

"You were kind to our lass, Mr. Carson, and you're varra welcome. Gan to hoose. I'se wait for Jim."

Jim arrived with another bag and Kit crossed the yard. Alison was at the back porch. Her color was rather high, but she gave Kit a level, inquiring glance, and he knew he must explain his arrival.

"I expect you're puzzled, and perhaps you're sympathetic," he remarked with a smile. "Looks as if I'd got fired?"

"No," said Alison quietly. "Had the company turned you down, you would not have come back. You have built the tanks!"

"To feel somebody believes in you is comforting," said Kit. "The first tank is built, and when the manager ordered me to put up the lot I felt I was entitled to take a holiday. I think that's all. I did not expect to see you; Jim stated you were visiting friends."

He imagined Alison knew it was all he dared talk about, but the look she gave him was strange and searching.

"I started for a farm across the hills, but the storm was bad and the water was on the road," she said. "But my aunts want to see you and I must get supper."

She showed Kit into a big flagged kitchen. Old ash trees grew near the window and the rain beat the glass. For the most part the kitchen was dark, but a fire burned in the big grate and the reflections touched polished brass and oak furniture. Kit thought the furniture was made when the house was built, and the crooked beams that carried the ceiling were cut long since.

An old woman got up from a chair by the fire, and when she gave Kit her hand he saw she studied him. Well, some curiosity was justified. Mrs. Tyson knew who he was; she probably knew he was forced to leave the shipyard, and Alison had talked about their adventures. Mrs. Tyson was thin and worn by sickness and labor, but her glance was keen, and her calm, somehow, was proud.

"You're welcome. If the rain does not stop you'll bide for the night."

"I must try for Netherhall," said Kit. "You ought not to have got up. I hope you're better?"

"Getting up is boddersome, but when you must you can," Mrs. Tyson replied, and put some old blue-pattern plates on the table.

Kit went to a settle by the fire, and after a few moments Alison came in and helped her aunt. Kit was satisfied to watch her. Alison moved harmoniously, and he liked her background. For all its austerity, the big room was homelike. Dark wood shone in the reflections from the grate, and he remarked the ruddy gleam of copper. Nothing was modern, but he felt all was good. The dalesfolk had no use for ambitious pretense. Their virtues and their drawbacks were primitive. Kit knew he

himself sprang from stock like that, and he had inherited a primitive vein, perhaps from his ancestor the smith. He thought he saw where Alison got her pluck and balance.

Mrs. Tyson called him to supper. The food was good, and to know his hosts were kind helped his appetite. In the farm kitchen he was at home. He had felt at home at the Canadian camps, but at Netherhall he had not. Somehow he was conscious of a subtle antagonism.

"Will you take some more, Kit?" Alison inquired. "Since steamship cooking's luxurious, I'm glad you like your supper."

"My liking it is rather obvious," said Kit, and gave his plate. "Anyhow, I know your cooking; I have not forgotten our feasts on board the cars. When I think about them, I recapture my lunch by the bluff at Harper's—crackers and cheese and the canned fruit the storekeeper gave me. How do you account for it?"

He thought Alison blushed, but she began to talk about Austin and Florence, and after a time Mrs. Tyson said:

"You'll not have got much news from Netherhall latterly?"

Kit remarked her use of the negative form, but he said he had not got much news and he thought she pondered. Alison was quiet, and Tyson talked about the floods. At length Mrs. Tyson got up and Kit went to the window. The ash trees shook in the wind and big drops splashed on the grass but the rain had stopped.

"I'm sorry to go, but I must take the road," he said.

"You had better get over fell in daylight," Tyson agreed. "We're plain folks, Mr. Carson, but if you're lonesome at Netherhall, we'll be glad to see ye back."

Kit got his coat and Alison went with him to the door. When they reached the porch Kit stopped and looked about. Mist rolled across the moors and the hills melted in the dark. A cold wind tossed the ash branches, and he heard a flooded beck. All was bleak and daunting, but the cheerful firelight flickered about the kitchen. Kit admitted he was not keen to start, and when he looked at Alison he knew she knew. Yet he felt she was somehow remote and elusive; in Canada Alison was frank.

"In the dark the fell road's awkward," she remarked.

"You want me to push off?"

"I think you ought to go," said Alison in a quiet, meaning voice.

Kit smiled, but the smile cost him much.

"Well, I've got to indulge you. When you stole away from Harper's you showed me my proper road, and the road was straight. That's all, my dear. Are you going back to Fairmead?"

"I don't know, Kit," said Alison. "If the old folks need me, I'll be content to stop. To come back was hard, but after all to be head clerk at the creamery is not a great ambition. One must take some knocks, but sometimes the knocks one is forced to take don't hurt as much as one imagines."

She gave Kit her hand and when he took the hill

track he was puzzled. Alison knew why he went to Netherhall and why he used control. All the same he fancied she and her relations knew something he did not. Anyhow she did not want another's lover; Alison was kind, but she was firm and proud. Kit set his mouth and pushed ahead.

CHAPTER XXXII

KIT CLAIMS HIS REWARD

DINNER was over at Netherhall, and Kit thought the old servant who took his bag and coat gave him a queer look. The man said Mrs. Carson had not yet gone to the drawing-room and opened a door.

Kit's boots were muddy, and now the light was good he saw he had not altogether brushed the calf-meal from his damp clothes. It did not look as if he were expected. Tyson's remarks bothered him, and he half-consciously braced up.

"Mr. Christopher!" said the servant, and Kit advanced.

The hall was spacious and the ceiling high. Only two tall pillar lamps were lighted, and Kit imagined Mrs. Carson would soon go to the drawing-room. She occupied a chair by the fireplace, and the illumination touched the group about her. All were quiet, and Kit stopped.

He knew he ought not to stop; he hated to be theatrical, but he felt his arrival was dramatic, and for a moment he did not see his part. The people by the fire had obviously got something of a jolt—all, perhaps, but Mrs. Carson, for Kit did not think

her surprised. Mrs. Haigh turned her head sharply, and Alan Carson's face got red. Farther back, Kit saw Jasper on a big couch. His look was inscrutable, but somehow Kit thought him amused.

Then Alan crossed the floor. His embarrassment was marked, and Kit knew he had forgotten his wife was hostess and was jealous for her authority.

"I'm glad to see you back," he said. "You can hardly have got my letter?"

"The last letter I got arrived some time ago and was about the accident at the forge," Kit replied, and turned to Jasper. "I hope you are better, sir!"

"Thank you," said Jasper with dry politeness. "We will talk about my injuries again. In the meantime, your arrival has excited some curiosity——"

"That is so," Alan agreed. "Why did you not write to us, Kit?"

Kit went to the fireplace. Mrs. Carson waited, and he addressed her.

"I started rather suddenly and expected to arrive as soon as a letter. I telegraphed from Liverpool."

"Then we did not get your message," said Alan, and turned to Mrs. Carson. "Shall I ring for Stubs and inquire? The fellow is careless."

Mrs. Carson stopped him, and giving Kit her hand, indicated a chair. She was polite and not at all embarrassed, and Kit imagined she knew something about the telegram. He, however, did not find out.

"At any rate, Kit wants some food, and I don't know if a room is ready," Alan went on. "Let me call Stubs."

"Stubs knows his business," Mrs. Carson rejoined. "I expect Kit would like to rest for a few minutes."

Kit sat down. Alan's fussy kindness was sincere, but Kit saw he was disturbed, and the others' satisfaction certainly was not marked. Sometimes in Canada he had pictured his triumphant return.

"Please don't bother," he said. "You see, I got some food at Whinnyates."

"At Whinnyates? But why did you go to the farm?" Mrs. Carson asked.

"A fellow driving a car picked me up on the road. I helped unload some cattle-meal, and Tyson gave me supper. When the rain went off I took the path across the fell," Kit replied, and thought he had told the others all they ought to know.

"Kit's clothes support his statement," Jasper remarked. "His habit is to undertake humorous adventures. Well, I don't see Harry carrying cattle-meal."

Kit turned his head. Evelyn and Ledward crossed the floor, and Kit thought her startled. Ledward's smile was rather forced.

"Hello, Kit! I don't know if we expected you, but your coming across was kind."

Evelyn gave Kit her hand. Her skin was cold and her color had vanished. When others were about one controlled one's emotions, but it did not look as if Evelyn's were joyous. She said nothing, and Mrs. Carson remarked:

"We don't yet know why you have come back, Kit, and I admit some curiosity. Although Evelyn told us you expected to get promoted at the

Manitoba bridge, you soon went away. I hope you have not given up another post!"

Kit knew Mrs. Carson's antagonism, and he got a hint of rather cruel satisfaction. Mrs. Haigh's look was hard, and Evelyn's was strange, but as a rule, when Kit was perplexed he indulged his freakish humor, and his mouth curved in a crooked smile.

"Since you know my habits, I expect you hope I was not *dismissed,*" he said. "On the whole, however, I think my not staying at the bridge was the proper plan. I went to the workshops, and after a time the company undertook to build some locomotive tanks. The tanks are large, and the cheap construction's awkward; but at a shipyard one learns something about the obstacles the engineers were up against. Well, I mustn't bore you. The company approved my suggestions, and when I put up an experimental tank they ordered me to build the lot. Since we were forced to wait for the material, I took a holiday."

Mrs. Carson's surprise was frank, Mrs. Haigh's look got thoughtful, and Jasper chuckled.

"You don't boast, Kit! I know something about the undertaking. The opposition's tanks leak, and if yours are tight I reckon your advance will be fast."

"It's possible, sir. All the same, the tanks are not yet built, and another time when I got an important job my luck was not very good."

The others said nothing, and Kit thought their quietness ominous. Jasper had indicated that he had made good, and all knew the reward he was

entitled to claim. After a moment or two, however, Mrs. Carson looked up.

"We hope you will be successful, Kit, and you no doubt deserve a holiday; but when you arrived we imagined you had got your uncle's letter and had come for the wedding."

"*Whose* wedding?" Kit asked sharply.

"Evelyn's and mine," said Ledward. "We are to be married very soon."

Kit tried for control. Mrs. Haigh had cheated him, and he turned and faced her. Her mouth was crooked and her face was lined; he felt he saw her as she really was—unscrupulous, shabbily ambitious, and altogether mean. The strange thing was, he knew she pondered.

"Since all is fixed, there is not much use in talking; but perhaps I am entitled to inquire from Evelyn why she decided to turn me down," he said in a level voice.

"After all, Evelyn did not promise to marry you."

"That is so. The stipulation was, I must get a good post. Well, my post is pretty good and I expect promotion; but to see Evelyn for two or three minutes is all I ask."

Mrs. Haigh signified agreement, and Mrs. Carson said, "The lamps are lighted in the drawing-room."

Evelyn went to the drawing-room and stopped by the fireplace. Kit leaned against a table a yard or two off. He knitted his brows, but his mouth curved, and Evelyn sensed ironical humor. In fact, she thought him like his uncle.

"Well?" she said, with an effort for calm.

"I'm not going to bully you. I want to know how

far Mrs. Haigh is accountable for your dropping me. No doubt she used some persuasion!"

"You believe she coerced me?"

"It's possible. When others thought me a thief and you'd have been justified to let me go, you were splendidly stanch."

"I was very rash," Evelyn rejoined. "But suppose I admitted I agreed to marry Ledward because my mother urged?"

"Then I'd see you did not!" said Kit in a quiet voice. "Although I'm not rich, I can support a wife, and I begin to go ahead. Perhaps my argument's not a lover's argument, but it has some weight. If you'll risk the plunge, I'll carry you off."

Evelyn was moved and humiliated. Kit was the reckless, impulsive lover she had thought. Yet she felt she must punish him for her shabbiness, and she laughed.

"It looks as if you knew mother, but did not know me! I'm not at all romantic and I weigh things. When you gave up your post at the shipyard I saw you did not think for me——"

"The shipyard people sent me off," said Kit.

"I am not a fool," Evelyn rejoined. "You might have stayed and allowed the thief to be found out; but so long as you felt you were very noble, you were satisfied to leave me alone. A girl hates to be left alone, Kit. She expects her lover to admire her, to help her get all she wants and make life joyous. Well, I admit I like to be where people are; I like fashionable clothes, and I hate poverty. You knew, and you ought to have made some effort to get rich; but when you went to Canada you once more

indulged your romantic vein. You didn't bother about my waiting at dreary Netherdale, pitied, rather contemptuously, by my relations."

"It looks as if I was selfishly careless, but until about a week since I couldn't meddle. I didn't know I would build the tanks, and my pay was small. The strange thing was, you thought Harry would see you out! I imagine he's not rich."

Evelyn was highly strung, and Kit's coolness broke her control. She saw she had not yet hurt him much.

"Jasper Carson was your friend and meant to help, but you antagonized him. Harry seized the chance you rather scornfully refused. He's your uncle's manager."

"Now I see!" said Kit, with a crooked smile. "Your object was to marry my rich uncle's favorite? Well, since Ledward has knocked me out, there's nothing to be said; but to know his personal charm hadn't much to do with it is some comfort."

Evelyn turned and faced him. Her skin was very white and her look was strained.

"You have some charm, Kit. Perhaps the trouble is, I have not much pluck. After all, I'm sorry——" she said, and signed him to go.

Kit went, and his emotions were very mixed. At length he knew Evelyn, and yet he felt she was sorry; he had sensed a note of sincere regret. Well, her remarks were justified, and he certainly was a fool; she was not the girl her lover ought to leave alone. Then he clenched his fists and frowned. For Evelyn's sake he had tried to conquer his love for Alison, and when he thought Mrs. Haigh bullied

her he had meant to carry her off. His anger vanished; he saw his heroic plan was humorous, and all he felt was relief. Evelyn was her mother's daughter, and she had given him his freedom.

When he got back to the hall Jasper gave him a smile.

"Then you are resigned, Kit? Since you like romantic exploits, I wondered whether you might not copy young Lochinvar's."

"The romantic days are gone, sir, and the bride was not willing," Kit replied, and turned to Mrs. Carson. "I shall not be long in England, and for me to stay at Netherhall might be embarrassing. In the circumstances, I'll go to the inn."

"If you would sooner, Kit, I must agree."

"Kit must stay here!" said Alan, and his eyes sparkled. "You have got a nasty knock, my boy, and I understand your feeling sore. In fact, I'll risk stating that you have some cause to be annoyed. For all that, you're my nephew and you are not going to the inn."

"You are kind, sir, but I think you're my only friend," said Kit, and faced the others. "When I left the shipyard you were willing for me to steal off to Canada. I expect you really doubted my innocence, and you afterwards took it for granted I carelessly refused to use the chances I got. My remaining might be awkward, and I think you'll be philosophical."

"Come here, Kit!" said Jasper. "I want you and I cannot get up."

Kit went to the couch. He felt he owed Jasper

nothing and the old fellow had joined his antagonists. For all that, his weakness bothered him.

"You must be just, and your statement was not accurate," Jasper resumed. "I, at all events, did not think you robbed the shipyard company."

"If you felt I was not the sort to let down my employers, I'm flattered; but I imagine you had some other grounds——"

"Your keenness is remarkable! Your friend Blake and his wife looked me up. I rather think Mrs. Blake forced her husband to be frank. Anyhow, I know who did sell the plans."

Kit glanced at the others. For Jasper to vindicate him was something of a triumph. Mrs. Carson's pose was stiff, and she turned her head. Alan frankly exulted. Mrs. Haigh looked straight in front and her thin mouth was tight. Kit saw she was disturbed, but he turned to Jasper.

"Yet you said nothing! You allowed me to carry a hateful load."

"To begin with, I did not know where you were," said Jasper dryly. "I might have found out, but since you obviously did not want me to know, I hesitated to inquire. All the same, I informed Meredith and Colvin, and if you like you can go back to the yard. Well, I suppose you are angry. Perhaps my line was puzzling; but as a rule I have an object——"

Mrs. Haigh gave Jasper a queer look, and Kit thought she saw his object; but it was not important.

"I am not going back to the shipyard, sir. I have a better job!"

"Then before you start for Canada I want to see

you. I am your uncle and the head of the house, and to meet me will not cost you much. Since getting about is awkward, perhaps you will allow me to fix the time and spot."

Kit was savage, but the old fellow's infirmity disarmed him. He agreed, and with an effort for politeness took his leave of Mrs. Carson, gave Alan his hand, and went off.

CHAPTER XXXIII

JASPER WINS

IN the morning Kit crossed the moor to Whinnyates. The sun shone, the wind was fresh, and swift cloud-shadows checkered the dry bent-grass. A larch wood on the hillside was bright like an emerald; the sheltered hollows were green with springing fern.

Kit went fast, and his mood was buoyant. He had done all he agreed to do, and now he was entitled to think for himself. Since Evelyn had cheated, he was free to marry where he loved. For all that, he had not yet persuaded Alison, and in the circumstances she might hesitate. Kit banished his doubts and smiled. As a rule, where he thought he had a rather heroic part the part was humorous, but he tried to play up. Well, Alison knew his follies and extravagances, and somehow he hoped she was not daunted.

When he got to Whinnyates nobody was about. The old ash trees tossed and the shadows of their thin leaves trembled on the stones. In the background sheep climbed the broken hillside and their faint bleating was musical. A noisy beck plunged down a ghyll and vanished behind a wall.

Kit crossed the farmyard to the porch. The door was open, and by contrast with the sunshine the kitchen was dark. Mrs. Tyson occupied a rocking-chair; Tyson by the chimney stirred a big black pot. When he heard Kit's step he turned and his eyes twinkled.

"You're back? Weel, we's glad t' see you. You'll stop for dinner?"

"Thank you," said Kit. "You're hospitable folk. I wonder whether you expected me?"

Tyson looked at his wife. The dalesfolk are keen, but they are cautious. Mrs. Tyson gave Kit a thoughtful glance.

"We reckoned you might come across. You kenned you'd be welcome."

"That's something," said Kit. "You see, I want to marry Alison. I thought you ought to know."

"Alison's a fine lass. You'll get none better, but she's not your aunt's sort," Mrs. Tyson remarked.

"Her father was a statesman, but when he died farm was sold to pay his debts, and t'lass came to us," said Tyson. "Tom Forsyth's land was wet and sour; maybe he was a bit feckless, but his luck was bad. Alison's her mother's dowter, an Wythops o' Lang Fell are canny, striving folk. Weel, my farm's landlord's, and when I and Kate are gone t'lass will maybe get five hundred pounds. I reckon it's aw'."

Kit knew a statesman is a yeoman farmer, owning the soil he cultivates, and he smiled.

"Mrs. Carson is not my aunt; I doubt if she'd admit I am her sort, and my fortune is sixty pounds.

Perhaps for Alison to marry me would be rash, but I've got a good job and I know her pluck."

"It's for t'lass to choose," said Mrs. Tyson. "You'll find her by t'beck."

Kit went along a stony lane. The splash of water got louder, and by and by Alison, carrying a large bucket, pushed back a gate. Her clothes were cotton print and she wore a blue sun-bonnet. When she saw Kit she stopped, and her color came and went. Kit put the bucket on the wall and held the gate.

"I think you know I love you, Alison."

"You did not tell me properly, Kit; but I did know," said Alison in a quiet voice.

"Then why did you let me go to Netherhall? You had heard about the marriage my relations planned."

"I thought you ought to go," Alison replied, and gave Kit a level glance. "If you had not gone, you would always have been sorry. Besides, I'd hate to think I tempted you to shabbiness."

"You are very proud, my dear, but I like your pride. Well, you tried me out, and now you ought to be kind, because the test was hard. In a week or two I must go back and get to work. Will you marry me before I start?"

"Are you altogether sure you want me, Kit?"

Kit smiled. "Perhaps your inquiry's logical, but I don't think you doubt. I wanted you, unconsciously, at the Winnipeg waiting-room, and when your train went I was forlorn. Afterwards, when I stayed with Bob for week-ends my visits were marked by a happiness for which I could not account. I thought Austin's home charming; I

didn't know the real charm was you were at the house."

"Ah," said Alison, "I wonder whether Florence enlightened you! Now I think about it, she forced the locomotive engineer to wait——"

"Florence admitted she was jealous, but we won't talk about Miss Grey. The light broke when I found you in the snow, and I was dazzled and carried away. For long I was strangely dull; but you know all and you're generous. I need you in Canada. You risk it?"

Alison blushed and gave him her hand.

"I'll marry you when you like, Kit, but I cannot yet leave Whinnyates."

Kit took her in his arms, and by and by he said, "Well, if Mrs. Tyson wants you, I must be resigned. You pay your debts and I cannot dispute her claim."

"When I join you all our debts will be gone; we will start without a load and look in front. In the meantime, aunt waits for the water."

Kit laughed and seized the bucket; Alison's thinking about the water was typical. They went to the house, and in the afternoon Kit started for the post-office. Mrs. Tyson stipulated for a wedding at the village church, and he must send Wheeler a cablegram.

Not long afterwards Ledward one afternoon arrived at Netherhall and joined Jasper in the library. For a time they talked about the forge and the letters Ledward brought; and then Jasper said:

"Your wedding is not for a few days, Harry, but you must go to Sheffield in the morning, and I thought I'd give you my present."

Ledward thanked him, and when he took the check looked up in surprise. Almost he doubted if he read the figures accurately, but the writing in the body of the form agreed.

"Your generosity is almost embarrassing, sir. I feel I ought not to take a sum like this——"

"When one marries I imagine money's useful, and I didn't see much advantage in your waiting for a legacy. Besides, to know an avaricious Government will not claim its share is some comfort," Jasper replied.

Ledward began to understand, but he waited, and Jasper continued:

"I am accountable for your starting on a business career. I excited your ambition, and perhaps your hopes."

"You made it possible for me to marry——" Ledward remarked, and stopped, for he saw Jasper's twinkle.

"The ground is awkward? Your beaten rival is my nephew. Well, if Evelyn and you are happy, Kit must bear his loss; and I want to talk about something else. Your help is useful, and since a wife is expensive, I must put up your pay." Jasper stated the increase and resumed: "So long as I can carry on and you are willing to work for me, you will get the sum. The important thing is, it's all you will get."

Ledward tried to brace up. The wedding present and increased pay was not all he had thought to get; but he admitted his employer was just.

"I am content, sir."

"Very well. I don't know if Evelyn will be as

philosophical, but that's another thing. Before very long I shall be forced to stop, and you are not my heir. For all that, my successor will need you, and I will stipulate for you to keep your post."

For a few moments Ledward was quiet. He had perhaps been justified in thinking himself Jasper's heir. At all events, Mrs. Haigh had reckoned on his inheriting, and he imagined she and Evelyn would get a nasty jolt.

All the same, he had some money; Jasper's wedding present was a useful sum, and his pay was good. For himself he was not remarkably ambitious, and he had taken the post because he wanted to marry Evelyn. He knew her calculating selfishness, and perhaps it was strange, but he was not much daunted. Evelyn was not a fool, and by and by he thought she would see she had not much grounds for discontent.

"I expect you know, I'm rather disappointed, but I must not grumble," he said. "When I joined you I was a fastidious loafer and was getting slack. You gave me an occupation I was soon keen about and made it possible for me to marry the girl I want. I owe you much, sir, and on the whole I think I'm fortunate. Anyhow, so long as you feel my help is useful, it is yours."

"Your judgment is sound and I like your pluck," Jasper remarked. "However, I get tired, and I expect your aunt will be interested."

Ledward agreed, and finding Mrs. Carson had gone to Mrs. Haigh's, he followed her to the house. Although he thought he could picture Mrs. Haigh's emotions, he was rather disturbed than sympathetic.

When he arrived tea was served, and Mrs. Haigh handed him a cup.

"Jasper has given me a wedding present," he said, and put the check on the table.

"He is extremely generous," Mrs. Carson remarked with keen surprise; but when Mrs. Haigh noted the sum her color got high and she set her thin mouth.

"He declares he is not," said Ledward. "You see, he says it's all I shall get."

Mrs. Haigh's hand shook, and she put down the teapot.

"Ah!" she said, "since the evening Kit arrived I think I expected something like that."

Ledward saw the knock was hard, but he knew her nerve was good, and he was moved to grim humor. Although Mrs. Haigh had lost the prize for which she planned, he thought she would not refuse the second best.

"But I don't see——" said Mrs. Carson in a puzzled voice; and then her eyes sparkled. "Jasper has cheated you!" she exclaimed and Ledward did not know whether she addressed him or her hostess. "From the beginning he plotted——"

"I think your relation did plot," Mrs. Haigh agreed, with an effort for calm. "Harry, however, has not yet told us very much."

Ledward began to narrate his interview with Jasper. After a few moments Evelyn came in, but he did not stop. Evelyn ought to know, and he did not want to talk about the thing again. She rested her arm on the table and her color came and went. All were very quiet, and Ledward felt his voice

jarred. When he stopped Mrs. Carson's look got very hard.

"Kit has conquered!" she remarked. "He gets all, and he will soon be your employer."

"Oh, well," said Ledward, "I think Kit's part was an unconscious part, and he's not revengeful. Jasper promises that I shall keep my post."

"He made a tool of you; he tricked us all——" said Mrs. Carson, and stopped, for she saw what her remarks implied. She frowned and got up. "Alan waits for me. We are going to Hadriansford."

Mrs. Haigh went with her to the gate, and Evelyn gave Ledward an embarrassed glance. Jasper had used her and Harry, and she was humiliated because she thought Harry knew. All the same, Harry would not admit it. His part was obvious, and she expected he would play up.

She pictured Kit's romantic charm; sometimes Kit had moved her strongly, but Harry did not. She had weighed Harry's advantages, and her mother's arguments had tipped the beam. For the most part, his advantages had vanished, but she could not call back Kit.

"I'm sorry," said Ledward; "I expect your disappointment's keen. Some of our plans for the future must go, but after all we really shall not be forced to be very economical."

Evelyn blushed and gave him a queer smile. "That is something! Since you're frank, I admit I hate to be frugal, but it looks as if Jasper did not altogether cheat you, and I suppose we must be

content. Well, we won't talk about it. Do you want some tea?"

Ledward said he did not. He thought Evelyn's inquiry typical, and they went to the garden.

In the morning Kit, at Whinnyates, gave Alison a note in which Jasper stated that if the afternoon were fine he would try to reach the Netherdale inn.

"You agreed to meet me, and although, I doubt if you were very willing, your word goes," Jasper wrote. "Then I would like you to bring Miss Forsyth. Perhaps I am not entitled to ask this favor, but I cannot get to the farm, and I hope she will indulge me."

"Perhaps I ought to go," said Alison. "I feel he's kind."

"He's a queer old fellow. For long I thought he didn't mean to bother about me, but I begin to doubt. I certainly did not try to win him over."

"I will go," said Alison in a thoughtful voice.

In the afternoon they crossed the moors. When they reached Netherdale a man pushed a wheeled chair along the road. A thick larch wood rolled down the hill and the sun was on the fresh green foliage and a high mossy bank. Jasper ordered the man to stop by a large beech trunk.

"Take a smoke and wait until I call," he said, and when the servant went off turned to Alison.

"You know who I am, and we won't bother Kit to present me. I did not invite you to Netherhall because the house is not mine, and I dare say you know my nephew's independence. Then since the spot is quiet and sunny, there is not much use in going on to the inn. You see, I soon get tired."

Alison saw he gave her ceremonious politeness, but his look was kind, and she smiled.

"Kit is independent, but sometimes independence like his is justified."

"It's possible," Jasper agreed. "Your championing Kit is natural, because I believe you are going to marry him very soon."

"I wonder whether you think I ought," said Alison quietly, and motioned Kit to wait.

"You are frank, but I like your frankness," Jasper replied. "Well, your lover is my nephew, and I know something about you. You spring from old yeoman stock and I think its virtues are yours. Our fortunes are recent and the founder of our house was a blacksmith. However, I want to talk to Kit, and I hope to have your support."

He indicated the smooth trunk and turned to Kit. "I imagine you feel you do not owe me much?"

"Perhaps I did feel something of the sort, but now I don't know. All the same, I'm puzzled. You found out Blake sold the boiler drawings. Yet you said nothing!"

"My reserve was calculated. From the beginning I had plans for you. Then I felt the money I used, which might be yours, was not altogether mine. Some I inherited, but all was got by sweat of brain and muscle at office and forge; I was resolved our fortune must not be squandered in social ambitions and extravagance. It must be used to forge steel, to build ships and bridges and rolling mills. Our business is to hammer iron and I felt I'd sooner see my nephew labor with a navvy's shovel than loaf about town."

"But since I did not want to loaf, I don't yet see——"

"I think Alison sees," said Jasper, and gave her a smile. "When a man marries he is not altogether a free agent; much depends on his wife and something on her relations. Well, I expect you will find Mrs. Carson's point of view is mine, Kit, and in the meantime we'll let it go. I wanted you to try your powers, to face obstacles, and get control and balance. In fact, I wanted to learn if you could go alone."

"I begin to understand, sir. You tried me out?"

"Yes; I experimented. I felt I was trustee for my fortune and the business the others had built, and when I was forced to quit I wanted a man all could trust to carry on my job. Now I am satisfied, and I offer you the post!"

Kit said nothing, but the blood came to his skin. He admitted he had not known Jasper, and his dulness humiliated him.

"You ought to agree, Kit. The job is yours," said Alison in a quiet voice.

"Thank you, my dear," said Jasper. "I reckoned on your support. Well, Kit?"

"I'm embarrassed, sir, and half ashamed. At the shipyard I thought you might some time help me get a post; but that was all, and when the company turned me down I resolved I wouldn't bother you. Since I'd got entangled, I myself must break the entanglement. Now I hesitate. I'm young, I don't know if I've yet got my proper balance, and the job's important. Then I undertook to build the

tanks for the Canadian company, and I must make good."

"That is so," said Jasper. "When you have carried out your undertaking, will you come back and talk about my plan again?"

"Yes, sir," Kit replied quietly.

"It's all I want; you must do what you agreed to do," said Jasper. "Well, I doubt if I can get to your wedding; but perhaps Alison and you will meet me another time before you start?"

He turned and gave Alison a gentle look. "I expect you know your lover. Kit is good stuff, and now he will go soberly I feel you and he will go far. I soon must stop, but you have youth and hope. Your road runs on across the horizon; perhaps to a better country than we old folks know."

Alison kissed him, and he gave Kit his hand and called his servant. The man pushed his chair down the hill and they presently vanished in the shadows of the wood. Then Alison turned to Kit.

"Your uncle is very fine! We must try to go where he expects."

Kit said nothing, but he kissed her, and they started up-hill in the sun.

THE END

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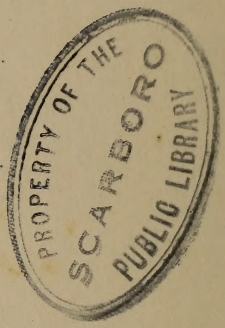
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